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# Metacognitive Consulting

Inviting Life Experience to Inform Practice

Rosemary Paget-Crowe

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This work is dedicated to my quite wonderful sister and my most beloved late husband.

“Nearly all great civilizations that perished did so because they had crystallized, because they were incapable of adapting themselves to new conditions, new methods, new points of view. It is as though people would literally rather die than change.”

- Eleanor Roosevelt, *Tomorrow Is Now* (1962)

I have decided I would rather change than die.

## **Preface**

This thesis develops a model that I have called Metacognitive Consulting.

Metacognition was defined by Flavell in 1976 as “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them” (Flavell J. , 1976, p. 232).

I began with a quest for understanding what I do and why I do it, what are the thinking processes that go on when it feels like I am at my best and how I might incorporate that into my future. It transpired throughout the inquiry that when I was at my best was when my mind was allowed to wander freely and unfettered.

I want to engage in a participatory way with those around me to understand myself, to be clearer about how I come to understand what goes on in my consulting interventions, how I come to the ideas about what is going on or generate ideas about how we might arrive at solutions, why was my mind sometimes not unfettered and what was the cause of the self-consciousness that would censor me?

I am bemused and slightly envious of others who claim to ‘know’ anything as I consider all knowing to be a transitory state and mostly illusory, but I notice the comfort and sense of place it gives to people who claim to have it, and the turmoil and anxiety it induces in those that don’t.

I recognise the assertion of knowing as part of a desire for certainty. This seems to be a preoccupation amongst clients who want designed outcomes and reassurances, but I believe certainty is a myth. What I believe we do have is an innate wisdom deep within us that we can connect to but that gets muffled by our life experiences, our egos and clever marketing.

I want to connect to my own innate wisdom as this is the place where I keep my voice, the stalwart ground from where I can practice with absolute authenticity. When I practice from here it is compelling and safe, it does not require influencing skills, clever gimmicks or flashy presentations.

This place is not about choosing the right words, in fact language increasingly gets in the way, but it is a place from which I can articulate my truth which, when I have found it, is unmistakeable.

There are two times in my life when I have most strongly connected to this wisdom; upon the death of my husband and the birth of my children. It is interesting for me that they should be the biggest periods of change in my life.

I am placing my Bereavement at the centre of this inquiry because not one aspect of my life went unchanged. It had an economic impact as my mortgages were paid off



and my purpose for working seemed to disappear, it had a political impact as I perceived a loss of status in no longer being a wife, financial impact – my car insurance went up, as did my bank balance, there was the social impact of no longer being one half of a couple, the demographic impact of being widowed young - the availability of support to women my age was scant. All this before I even start on the emotional impact; staring at the stairs every night and thinking I would be climbing them on my own for quite some time and the physical impact from enduring a pain so intense I thought I might actually die. My mental health was clearly affected as I found myself standing under a hot shower chanting “I want my husband back” every morning like it was some kind of obsessive mantra.

I was curious about what I could learn from such fundamental change that I could bring to my consulting practice, given that much of my work carried many similar characteristics in helping facilitate Change that was fundamental, uninvited, wide and far-reaching.

As part of teaching some Masters students whose working lives in Child Protection have been subject to significant change, I conducted an appreciative inquiry asking them to reflect on what constituted “good” and “bad” change experiences. Once we got past the initial belief that there was no such thing as good change, what emerged was that uninvited change was the most challenging and distressing aspect of their working lives. When they reflected on examples of “good” change they typically focused on life experiences outside of their organisations where experiences, though sometimes painful and difficult, were at least invited and ultimately resulted in outcomes that they *knew* to be beneficial.

What I became curious about was how we might gain the same sense of benefit from the uninvited change, how might any change experience might be deemed to be beneficial, whether we feel we have initiated it or not. I am placing the opportunity for learning and personal growth at the heart of the perceived benefit of uninvited change.

I want to provide practical knowledge by capturing the metacognitive experience of Change in this thesis. I feel intuitively that this will bring about some ending to the ongoing processing of grief in the forefront of my mind.

I want to be the best person I can be, the best consultant I can be, leading the richest possible life, moving forward to enjoy what could be rather than looking back at what was. Paracelsus said only the wounded physician can heal, having struggled and struggling with my own life I feel there is a contribution I can make and this inquiry is to help me find what that is. I want to make this a creative wound.

It is a spiritual form of Action Research, to seek answers in this place. I feel emancipated from grief, from hegemony, from my ego and social constructs.

Bradbury and Reason (Peter Reason, 2011, p. 2) characterize Action Research as having 5 broad characteristics:

- 1) Contributing to Human Flourishing
- 2) Addressing practical issues
- 3) Providing knowledge in action
- 4) Emergent developmental form
- 5) Participation and democracy

This is why I am siting this inquiry in Action Research, to contribute to my own human flourishing and the flourishing of others who experience profound uninvited change. My innate wisdom is telling me that if I can extract the learning from the experiences of profound change and practicing at my best I will have a way to address practical issues with the empathic understanding of having been there. By participating with others we will create Knowledge in Action, in dialogue with each other, without any attempt on my part to “tell” the other how it is. I refer in the Methodology section to how the Methods I employed came about as I explored what seemed like an extraordinary new world, a world in which I put myself at the centre for a short while in order to resolve my inner distress and to be able to then turn my attention outwards to supporting others rather than picking over my own wounds. This thesis is written in two voices; my Emotional voice in Part 1 and my Rational voice in Part II. In my Final Words I have tried to bring these two voices together. I have written in a style that shows how knowledge arose in action and collaborations, emerging and influencing the methods I employed and working in a participatory way. This reflects what I have learned about my metacognitive way of working, that I respond in an emotional way and use this emotional response as a bedrock to rational thought.

In the second part I want to demonstrate that rational thought arising from the emotional. I want to show the value of the emotional approach as I follow my intuition in discovering both the methods that will unlock my learning and the inquiry and to give a sense of how I arrived at the metacognitive model of working, through my own lived experience. I want to resurface experience based ways of knowing such that I can present a way of working in which the process of learning is as important as the event of presenting a final working model.

I want to validate my lived experience as a method of inquiry and how it enabled me to make explicit the feelings and dissonance that I had about things that had previously gone unexplained. For example, I was uneasy about my earlier working life even though I enjoyed it and was well rewarded. I never took the time to explore the cause of that unease. There was data in this that contributed to understanding the experience of and recovery from grief.

The emotional section demonstrates that the model I formulated for my future practice came through personal change experience and the inseparability of myself from my practice. Developing the model this way resulted in discovering a practice that was congruent with my values and with which I could participate authentically. This is why I make the case that all Consultants should engage in some period of self-reflection in order to understand themselves more fully, it may appear self-indulgent but my hope is to make the case once we have that understanding we can move forward.

Part 1 of the thesis embraces the Action Research principles of emergent developmental form and participation and democracy as I show the importance of being receptive rather than pursuant, allowing information to come towards me rather than chasing it, to highlight how language didn't serve me at times and that I needed to employ other methods to understand/feel understood.

In both parts of this thesis the same patterns replay, albeit in the apparently conflicting paradigms of Emotionality and Rationality. This thesis will demonstrate the importance of setting the paradigms alongside each other. This is in keeping with my participatory Ontological position that there is an underlying oneness that unites

us all. The ontological and epistemological position that informs this way of working is explained further in Part II.

In addition, in Part II my intention is to underpin the process of discovery and practice with Literature from others who have advocated feelings based practice that has evolved from making sense of extraordinary life experience.

# Part 1 My Emotional Inquiry

## 1. Introduction

I want to extend a very warm welcome to you to my document. Ideally I would like us to sit together, I would welcome you, take off your coat, make sure you were comfortable, offer you a cup of tea. If this section had a sound track it would be Spring from Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Full of excitement and trembling like violin strings. You would see my desire for you to understand this in the manner it is intended and my enthusiasm to see the things that you can see and the meaning it holds for you. In an ideal world we would make meaning together because I am very worried about appearing to "tell". I am all about dialogue. Ideally in the moment. Without too much planning. Heart to heart. Cooperatively, connected to the people around me. Before my self-consciousness has the chance to kick in.

There is every possibility in our conversation that I could project onto you the demonic deputy head master with his flaring nostrils and his angry disposition, the PE teacher who found my way of being in the world incomprehensible or any number of other authority figures who have hushed my voice because I've let them, or the princesses who have privileged their own needs above all other.

However this thesis is about addressing all that. You may make me feel accomplished, understand me like never before, feel mild affection for my open eyed naiveté. Embrace my struggles and see in them some of your own or recoil from them and think "thank god that wasn't me".

I don't know who you are reading this but my way of working requires that we do get to know each other a bit first, know if we can work together, not necessarily whether we think alike, much more potential richness if we don't. The way I have presented this work is my pithy attempt to share with you in a dialogic way. How can I be dialogic with no idea who you are? How can I incorporate your belief system in how I express myself, meet you where you are? Embrace your position as much as my own? How can a written piece have any dialogic element? If I can't know who you are I can at least let you know who I am. That's how I started this inquiry, wanting to know who I was, what drove me previously and what I value now. I come from a very left brained tradition and these questions never really got asked before. But it seems the bedrock of my inquiry from which all sense making has flowed and hence it seemed important that this should come first. A sensible logical move, heaven forbid that you interpret it as me privileging myself, that would be a setback from which we might never recover!

The thesis being presented in two halves, is reflective of my life, which also seems to be a dichotomy; the rational way I practiced before and the greater role of the emotional after the transformative effect of being widowed.

I discovered at the heart of my practice is an intuitive sense of knowing that manifests itself in imagery. It transpires through this inquiry that after half a lifetime of logical, rational thinking I discover I really rather value intuition. If I am to use this inquiry to work out my life going forward it seems sensible that I should find a way of working that is congruent with these values. I want to avoid the time and energy spent in the past on suppressing feelings that I am somehow swimming against the tide. This is an action inquiry into professional practice too so I need to

understand whether this way of working is feasible, to quote Bill Torbert (Torbert, 2014) will the outcome enable me to be :

- “increasingly capable of listening into the present moment from which the future emerges;
- increasingly alert to the dangers and opportunities of the present moment; and
- increasingly capable of performing in effective, transformational, and sustainable ways.”?

It seems better to find that out sooner rather than later so in the chapters that follow setting out who I am, I get underway with practicing in this intuitive way that attends to feelings and privileges imagery to determine exactly what is going on, to see if it stands up to scrutiny. I want to know if my intuitive self yields any useful data that I can put alongside my former rational self; the IT practitioner, teacher and accountant. I am privileging the intuitive mind not just in the work but in how I am presenting the work.

Allowing a space to emerge into which anything could occur created a great deal of distress and disturbance in the early days of the inquiry; incredible coincidences, experiences, how much richness was available from a life I didn't seek to control or coerce. I was in danger of getting lost and disheveled so I incorporated a methodology to contain the rich seam of disturbance without losing sight of all that I was learning.

I have been very keen throughout this inquiry to hold to the integrity of my thinking, beliefs and authorship and so I navigated a tricky relationship with Literature. I knew I had to site myself in a body of existing work but I didn't wish to succumb to undue influence. It became more important to me in the early stages to discover my own



voice first rather than to engage in any kind of conformity to what has gone before. It was a reaction to a prior way of knowing the world that privileged facts from learned texts and which I held partly responsible for the disordered dichotomy that I was trying to untangle.

Working in a world that privileged rational logical thought created something of a dilemma, I found it somewhat wanting when faced with the real issues of life; the births, the deaths, some of the things that happened in between. There was enormous excitement for me in finding that what I had intuited did have some place in Literature that had gone before, something of the triangulation that my positivist self still appreciates, the measurement from more than one standpoint – my intuitive self and secondary research. But as I purposefully found my place in the Literature after finding my own voice first, this explains why this chapter is some way down the document. I have used the word Intuition quite a lot in this introduction. I intend that the Literature review will show you I am speaking about a very specific area of intuitive knowing that incorporates the Transpersonal. The intuition I am specifically using dissolves the boundaries between you and I as we become a "We".

It is a big ask that you bear with me whilst I present the inquiry in this way, ask you to trust me with no idea of who I am, I wouldn't ask it of my clients, not without establishing a relationship first. I am starting off the section with a review of my methodology and methods to show you how I went about this inquiry.

## 2. Methodology

### *Introduction*

I was looking for a way to connect to my truth. When I have connected to my truth I have unfettered clear thinking, like the feeling of being in cool clear water or fresh mountain air.



**Figure 1** The Colour of Truth

I used the word Essence in a study group when trying to describe what I was inquiring into, having initially adopted Van Manen's approach to Researching Lived Experience and his use of Merleau-Ponty's application of the word essence as something "we do not mean some kind of mysterious entity or discovery, nor some ultimate core or residue of meaning" (Manen, 1990, pp. 39-40). However the word Essence created a sense of confusion and references to Sartre started flying about, it all got rather confusing and I realised how distracting language can be.

So I proceeded without descriptor and started the process of digging down deeply into myself to understand myself and how I practiced. This is very in keeping with Phenomenological inquiry which Van Manen describes as a preoccupation with “the concreteness (the ontic) as well as the essential nature (the ontological)” (ibid).

**DIG DOWN DEEP** Words and music by Libby Roderick  
 c Libby Roderick Music 1991.  
 From *If the World Were My Lover*

I'm digging way down, down to the bottom of my soul  
 I'm digging way down, way down deep  
 I'm digging way down, down to the bottom of my soul  
 There's clear water running through me.  
 Ain't got no answers, got a whole lotta questions and  
 Nothing on the surface seems to satisfy me  
 Can't find it on the outside, got to feel it on the inside and  
 Dig down deeper in the mystery.  
 So I am, I'm digging way down...  
 When terror strikes me in the middle of the night  
 And even arms around my body can't comfort me  
 My heart is thirsting for that cool drink of water  
 Got to pull out my shovel, get busy  
 So I am, I'm digging way down...  
 Cool, clear water flowing through me  
 Washing all my fears away  
 Cool, clear water flowing through me  
 Moving me up, moving me up towards the light of day  
 When daybreak finds me in the morning light  
 And it's hard to hold onto what set me free  
 I go down to the river 'cuz it helps me remember  
 To dig down deeper in my time of need.  
 So I am, I'm digging way down...

**Figure 2 Dig Down Deep**

Van Manen's approach advocates turning to a phenomena that seriously interests us and to investigate the lived experience as we experience it. He suggests various

methods (personal experience, tracing etymological sources, researching idiomatic phrases and obtaining experiential descriptions from others) all of which I have employed at various times. These approaches helped me to identify that Imagery lay at the heart of my inquiry and that I was repelled by what I perceived as inauthentic attempts to create reality through the artifice of rituals, artefacts or metaphors. It also helped me to discover just how much emotion plays a part in my practice and how difficult that is for others to digest. However, Van Manen suggests we then reflect on the essential themes by a process of writing and rewriting, and this made me very uncomfortable. In writing and rewriting I felt I was creating a homogeneity that was at odds with how much I valued individuality and diversity, the aim of this process is to conclude one's inquiry with a single general description, whereas I was seeking to generate something new that was informed by my inquiry. My reaction to Van Manen's suggestion helped me to identify my aversion to strait-jacketing people into models but meant I had to find another methodology. A student from a previous cohort had written a similarly themed thesis around embodiment and had relied on Autoethnography. There is significant congruence between the methods in this Methodology and what I was trying to achieve; I read:

“writing is a method of discovery”;

“a research approach that privileges the individual” (Muncey, 2010, p. 2);

“many people”, according to Muncey “resort to it as a means of getting across intangible and complex feelings and experiences that somehow can't be told in conventional ways”(ibid).

However, these methods are not exclusively the prerogative of Autoethnography. Muncey suggests producing an artefact as an outcome of the inquiry and I was

unhappy about doing that, I had tried sculpting and drawing my mental imagery only to find I was unable to faithfully represent what was in my head, becoming too caught up in my self-consciousness. This self-consciousness and how I might set it aside became an aspect of the inquiry, but I was uncomfortable about how Autoethnography seemed to lack structure.

“Structure sets you free” the author Guy Saville said to me once, advice I was happy to take, albeit tempered by reluctance to be strait-jacketed into anything too mechanistic. Too much structure and I would feel restricted from following the ‘felt sense’ of direction of travel, not enough and with all the emotions aroused by writing about such an intensely personal and difficult time and I would be in freefall.

I wrote in my Transfer Paper that, “I didn’t want methodological rigour standing in the way of the opportunistic unplanned path that has been at the heart of this emergent topic” (Paget-Crowe, 2011).

I wanted to find a methodology in the middle ground. A pattern I can see I replay, looking at extremes as either ends of a continuum and striving to achieve the happy medium. In this case I sought a Methodology that would be an enabler; not advocating a course of action to the exclusion of others but holding the space open securely and safely.

When I began the exploratory work into the subject of my thesis, the fact that it was about my grief was hidden. The most dominant feature in the first round of inquiry was to find out how Mental imagery served me. This was a phenomenon that informed how I made sense of things, how I determined what was going on and a tool in making myself understood. Looking into this as a phenomenon, I was drawn to

phenomenological methods, in particular the Duquesne School of Phenomenology because of its focus on descriptive analysis rather than explanation.

Phenomenological research methods following the Duquesne tradition require us to suspend our presuppositions or assumptions about explanations, a process proposed by Husserl and referred to as Bracketing or Epoche.

According to Langdridge (Langdridge, 2007, p. 27) Husserl wants us to “critically examine our experience or work through all the available possibilities” rather than getting on with living it with all our natural biases. This seemed like the right approach had my inquiry stayed wholly on the subject of imagery but I feared it would not get me to the deeper layer of personal understanding. How would I achieve the self knowledge if I was true to Epoche and bracketed off my suppositions? Vaughan and Walsh (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993) point to how dangerous excessive theoretical and metaphysical suppositions can be, especially when they go unrecognised. They write “Presuppositions seem to function as cognitive biases that shape selective attention, perception, memory and interpretation”. This underpins my reasons for examining my own life in order to be explicitly aware of the suppositions I carry as a lack of awareness tends to “reduce cognitive flexibility and openness to novel experiences”.

In Rogers approach to Therapy this permits indwelling in the complexity of the experience and fully entering into the unknown. This is a state of surrender, an altered state of consciousness, it allows us to bring to bear “intuition, knowledge and experience, reason and subtle body sensations” to arrive at an understanding (O'Hara, 1986, p.179).

I wanted an understanding of my suppositions so that I could be aware of them in my practice, see how they might help or hinder, not set them aside permanently that I would give up my personality and character nor temporarily for the purposes of carrying out this research.

Bracketing is a challenge for the phenomenological inquirer, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty all support Epoche as an idea but cannot be sure it is truly achievable. It seems to me it can only really work if you are confident that you have prior knowledge of what your suppositions are. Nevertheless I constantly strive to “let the things we experience appear in our consciousness as if for the first time” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 18). Heron describes it as the “need to bracket off and hold in suspension the concepts that direct you to it...If you bracket the concepts entirely out of the way there is no determinate experience that you can identify and ask to reveal itself....” (Heron, 1992, p. 9).

I still sought to privilege my lived experience over theory and so stayed in the territory of Phenomenological inquiry where “theory enlightens practice, it does not stand before it” (Manen, 1990, p. 15). Had I allowed a phenomenological approach to dominate I would have privileged mental imagery above all else and this might not have afforded me the personal healing or self awareness that I was also seeking.

I read through Loneliness, Moustakas’s book on the topic in which he applies his own methodology to the experience of loneliness, and the kinship I felt with him and his honest account of his struggles confirmed to me that this was the methodology I wanted to go forward with. I decided I would strive to be as honest and vulnerable as Moustakas. Rather than amalgamating into a single description, Moustakas advocates Creative Synthesis at the conclusion of the inquiry, this was more what I



sought rather than Van Manen's single description. Deciding this gave me a sensation of "natural closing" (Moustakas, 1990, p.55). A feeling that I am familiar with which accompanies having found my authentic truth. There was learning in that, not only that I have an internal barometer that informs me when I am behaving authentically, but also that I am much more able to hear what a writer wants to say when I feel some kind of understanding of who they are.

Moustakas enabled a way to attend to feelings, sensations and repeating patterns to discover their informing qualities, much like Van Manen advocated, but with Moustakas by my side I was able to put myself through experiences in the interests of stimulating the dormant wisdom within and bringing it to the surface. By maintaining an "unwavering and steady inward gaze" (Moustakas, 1990, p.13) the heuristic researcher comes to "a deeper understanding of whatever is calling out from the inside self to be understood" (Sela-Smith, 2012). In some respects I wanted to recreate the rebirthing experience of being bereaved but in a more contained way. I hoped this would mean that at the same time as being transformed I would not be so traumatised I was unable to observe and extract learning. Hence putting myself through transformative processes in the tender embrace of a methodology that could steady me.

The methodology seems very organic, intuitive, it seems to give form to the way my mind would have worked things out but also felt like it held me whilst I worked my way through some difficult territory. Braud and Anderson describe it as a masculine approach and maybe that was what was needed to balance the more feminine, emotional times. Sela-Smith writes that in resolving a crisis in her own life, she found she had intuitively paralleled the methodology also, which seems to reinforce its natural and rather unconstraining nature (Sela-Smith, 2012).



Ultimately, I chose a heuristic methodology because “In its purest form heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through internal pathways of the self” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 122). Braud and Anderson describe it as akin to phenomenological inquiry in that the researcher must have some lived experience of the topic under review, they describe it as more inward focussed. I am fearful that this may come across as self-indulgent but then wonder what might be my issue with self-indulgence if it serves to heal me and send me back into the working world of a more self-aware practitioner.

I didn’t expect that this methodology would allow me to sail through but I felt confident that I could work with it. Choosing Moustaka’s heuristic approach felt like I had married the right person with whom I could work through life’s ups and downs, not like I had fundamentally made a mistake and would be forever papering over the cracks until one of us summoned up the courage to limp away, demoralized and fractured.

I felt confident that in these processes of “Self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery” (Moustakas, 1990, p.11) I would be “actively awakening and transforming my own self”.

Whereas I had the methodology in place before commencing the work, many of the methods arose organically in response to a felt sense of the direction of travel. My methodology was value-driven rather than method driven, I didn’t want to narrow my landscape by charting a course. I viewed executing the methodology in an emergent and intuitive way as an opportunity to test the intuitive way that I was proposing to

practice. If intuition led me on a fruitful course I would feel I could have confidence to practice in this way. In addressing my concern that this might be viewed as a self-indulgent inquiry, what I am actually doing is testing things on myself first.

### ***Methodology and Research Paradigm***



**Figure 3** Two intermingled paths of one inquiry

The Personal and Professional journey were intermingled; I was hoping to understand my grief in order to be able to integrate it into my life. Integrating it into my life would make me a better consultant, more available to my client than nursing my own wounds and wondering why they were so painful. I had tried reading books to understand my bereavement process better, and had not found this very satisfactory. A friend said at the time that, faced with the same set of circumstances, he couldn't imagine that he would be able to take such a rational approach. The approach didn't work, I was uncomfortably scanning the literature scoring people for their degree of suffering to see if theirs came close to mine. It horrified me that I could in any way want to find people in anguish. What I really sought was kinship, empathy. The difficult feelings and the fact it wasn't working led me to take a more experiential approach of following my feelings, "a new glimpse of our own story is therapeutic in the most profound sense.... a widening of vision, an increase in wisdom" (O'Hara, 1986, p. 176).

Healing of the Self by attending to feelings and inner wisdom sits comfortably in Moustakas's heuristic methodology. Moustakas writes (Moustakas, 1990 p. 103) that Heuristic Research is an approach that through internal experience one takes a unpredictable, unplanned path where the question is not known and needs to be discovered. Heuristics recognises the contribution that subjectivity makes to knowledge and considers it an essential condition in understanding what is real.

According to Anderson (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 75) Heuristic methods privilege the personal voice of the researcher, and it is this intuitive understanding that Anderson considers gives it "a universal voice and character". (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p75).

Sela-Smith (Sela-Smith, 2012) is rather critical of the methodology. Despite having mirrored the approach, she observes Moustakas using the references to Self and Self having an Experience, interchangeably. This is not problematic for me as my inquiry oscillated between my own search for good health, taking care of my Self, and my desire to develop my way of working through the observation of my best and most authentic experiences, by observing my Self having an Experience. It helped me to live with the discomfort that I felt when my experiences appeared imminent and paradoxically transcendent, at the same time. I was looking to recreate the transformative effect of bereavement in terms of laying myself bare and discovering the self that existed behind the encultured Persona. In this way I was examining my inner world, but in doing that I wanted to retain some level of control that would enable me to look at the experience of that transformation in order to better understand and convey it.

Sela-Smith acknowledges that Heuristic inquiry provides access to what Polanyi (2009) describes as tacit knowledge but then references Moustakas and Stern (1985) in discussing the difficulty of bringing that tacit knowledge into conscious awareness. Sela-Smith's concerns about the methodology seem to centre around the possibility that we will lose our connection to tacit knowledge at the point when we try to bring it into conscious awareness if we follow the methodology as Moustakas sets it out.

This issue of bringing tacit knowledge into conscious awareness is integral to this inquiry, this feeling of finding out what something feeling wrong was about and bringing that learning into consciousness. I hit a language barrier similar to the experience of trying to meet psychologists where they were when I started the Masters (outlined in the Autobiography). It led me to incorporate the issue of

language into the inquiry and to seek to understand and be understood through the medium of imagery.

The heuristic researcher approaches the methodology in a state of surrender, requiring that we relinquish control and allow discovery to flood in. It was the process by which I was able to surface real understanding, both of what my own inquiry experience was and how to incorporate this approach into future working.

To free myself from the cognitive mind and find a more experiential path I went for a walk. I took a different path off my normal route and journaled the experience. Walking is recognised in Qualitative Ethnographic Research as a method of inquiry for reasons of meditation, spectatorship, entangled pathways and ways of knowing (Jung Y. , 2013). All of these reasons contributed to my understanding of what I was looking for in a Methodology.

*“I take a left down a bridleway. I’ve not noticed it before and find myself in a wide open meadow. A river runs through it and the water is spectacularly clear, with the most enormous fish in it. There are cattle ahead and I approach with some trepidation but they continue to chew the cud and stare at me benignly. There are some people up ahead. I have never been here before and it’s absolutely beautiful. As I carry on the sky gets a bit grey, I’m not wearing anything waterproof and I realise I’m completely lost.*

*I press on thinking I can always ask directions but the people I saw previously have disappeared, I look around for landmarks but recognise neither the ancient spire nor the brand new wind turbine. I take a breath, throw my heart open and realise what now seems perfectly obvious, that I’m going to end up somewhere I recognise if I follow the river.”*

**Figure 4 Journal extract from the planning phase**

In the walk I am exploring, looking for landmarks, some ancient, some modern. I play out the same patterns in the inquiry; in this case getting lost, exploring new territory, seeing the subject of inquiry very clearly but not the whole landscape, navigating the stormy weather, being ill-prepared for changes in conditions, unfamiliar hazards ahead, opening up my heart and finding myself alone at times but ultimately using major landmarks to find my way back.

This walk was what I was looking for, the methodology needed to make a space for all the things I needed to do, so that I could feel a sense of progress and of journeying through, remain focussed on the task in hand whilst still allowing me a fair amount of wandering off into the forest. I was entering an entirely new “meadow” of exploration, bounded by hedges and gates but filled with obstacles and challenges, perceived threats and unfamiliar things. I was in a raw and unprepared and unprotected state and I needed to place my trust in the environment, “let go of the known and swim in the unknown current” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13), feel safe in the knowledge that whilst I was free to explore there was a path that I could get back to.

I am intending to show how the methodology helped me to surface the inquiry, the question and how I subsequently went on to use methods such as case studies to respond to the question.

I want to be open and honest about the experiences that have moved my inquiry forward as I am hoping I can encourage others to do the same. When I was open and honest about the experience of my bereavement I noticed the effect it had on those around me, others started to talk about things that had affected them and move themselves from positions of paralysis.



Some matters are essentially private and some seem esoteric, but it is my belief that whilst we deny and disguise our experiences we miss opportunities for growth both personally, professionally and collectively.

I feel vulnerable and a bit exposed but Vulnerability is the desired state that I want to encourage clients to enter, because this is where I feel the work of real and lasting change can begin. Examining the dark spaces that we fear, embracing rather than rejecting change that we did not invite and might have preferred not to have experienced. How can I support a client to go into those spaces unless I am first prepared to enter them myself?

The longer we disavow how we experience the world in all its complex, challenging, embarrassing and confusing *mêlée*, the more I feel we miss tapping into a rich seam of learning.

When I was frustrated by a lack of progress, I found the exasperated voice of Jung; “But my soul answered, “you speak as if you have still learned nothing. Can you not wait? Should everything fall into your lap ripe and finished?” (Jung, *The Red Book*, 2009, p. 236).

When I thought I was going mad because as the phenomenon began to find a voice it sounded so esoteric, I read; “It is ....dangerous to dismiss out of hand knowledge gleaned from experience that fails to meet conventional standards of truth” (Belenky, Tarule, Goldberger, & Clinchy, 1986, p. 224).

Libby Roderick’s lyrics capture the sense of needing something bigger than oneself to contain what seems like an enormous expanse of sea.

## LAY IT ALL DOWN

Words and music by Libby Roderick

© Libby Roderick Music 1997

From *Lay it All Down*

Lay it all down when you can't hold it

Let it all fall, set it all free

When the night falls and it grows cold in

The midst of the journey and you fall to your knees

Sometimes two legs simply can't hold us

Sometimes two arms are simply too weak

Lay it all down when you can't hold it

Let your life carry you like a boat on the sea.

Like a boat on the sea that has slipped all its moorings

Like a boat on the sea with no wind in its sails

Like a boat on the ocean drifting far from the harbor

With not even a thimble for the drifter to bail.

Oh...

Lay it all down when you can't hold it

Let it all fall, set it all free

When you are lost, down to the bone and

You're calling for mercy, calling out "please,"

Sometimes two legs simply can't hold us

Sometimes two arms are simply too weak

Lay it all down when you can't hold it

Let your life carry you like a boat on the sea.

You turn to the east, nothing but ocean

You turn to the west, no sign of the shore

You turn to the south, water to the horizon

You don't even need to turn to the north

Like a boat on the sea...

Ohh....

Figure 5 Libby Roderick's Lyrics capture the Supporting role of methodology

If I relate methodology to my previous career at KPMG (see Autobiography) when I was involved in Systems Implementation, it was often the case that clients would not



really perceive that they were ‘doing’ or ‘progressing’ until they were pressing configuration buttons on the keyboard. My role as a Consultant in this setting would be to hold this tension and ensure that proper investigation and preparatory work was done. The consequence of failing to prepare adequately in terms of scope and user requirements would be conflicting business issues and unresolved requirements popping up much later down the project line, making them costlier and more difficult to fix. Sometimes remedial work would not be possible at all because design decisions had been made that did not support what was required, meaning unsatisfactory “work-arounds” needed to be found. I did not want experiences like this in my doctoral inquiry, I did not want unexpected truths popping up because of a lack of planning on my part, I needed contingency space for the unexpected so that it might be properly attended to, not glaring holes, conflicts or contradictions because I had not prepared adequately at the start.

### ***Methods***

Figure 6 Barthes 1986

“There is no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to the scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method.”

This quote from Roland Barthes captures something of how I feel about being too prescriptive or definitive of approach before having even started the inquiry. What he seems to be saying to me is that the whole pioneering spirit of adventure that enraptures and sustains us through a turbulent inquiry can be completely quashed if we attempt to assert in advance that we know where we are headed or what form of transport we are using. The methods employed in the course of this inquiry have been many and varied but have also tended to emerge to fit the path I was on at a particular stage.

In Heuristic research methods this is not only allowed but positively encouraged. The process should be exploratory, ideally unfolding without special intervention or any attempt to force a direction.

The methods I employed originally were intended to surface my prejudices and lenses on the world to become a more self-aware practitioner. I deeply explored through reflective journaling and in conversation with others, exactly what preconceptions and life world form the backdrop to this inquiry. This participatory approach is entirely congruent with my ontological position that we are social animals, connected to each other, succeeding better together than apart.

My autobiographic account makes my presuppositions explicit rather than implicit so I can shine a light on them and be aware of them, both in my inquiry and in my practice.

I employed heuristic methods; focussing, indwelling and intuition because these are experience-based techniques for problem solving, learning, and discovery. Once I had shone the light on who I was, I wanted to understand how I practice.

I used interviews, dialogue (with myself, others), music, art, photography, running, walking, literature, indwelling, case studies, poetry, automatic (akin to stream of consciousness) writing, painting, drawing and master classes. I attended courses, lectures and seminars. My main aim was to create sufficient disturbance to be able to observe myself when I was at my authentic best, and to be true to my epistemological view that there are many ways to know something and that language can be an obstacle if used in isolation.

Sometimes, to paraphrase Gadamer referenced by Van Manen, it seems “the method is that there is no method” (Manen, 1990, pp. 29-30). My searching for a methodology highlighted the pattern that when I was in difficulty or perceived myself as ‘stuck’ an answer would reveal itself to me by me adopting a receptive orientation rather than by active pursuit on my part. Often the act of pursuit would send solutions running, Moustakas says we need to “receive and accept” (Moustakas, 1990, p.11). “The irreducible elements of experience, simple intuitions, are not of our making; they are given to us” wrote Merleau-Ponty (Dillon, 1998, p. 10). Hence quiet contemplation was also a method I employed.

I became aware of how little control I had over timing - managing my own anxiety about when a solution would emerge and feeling pressure to get things underway was an uncomfortable and difficult learning for someone of my impatience. I had held clients to preparatory work when what they really wanted to do was relieve their anxiety by pressing buttons, and it seemed I was getting a chance to empathise.

I set out below the key processes in the methodology and how I employed them through my inquiry and the different methods I employed following my intuited sense of direction and what that helped me to discover.

## **Initial Engagement**

### **My Starting Point**

“The task of initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications.” (Moustakas, 1990, p.27).

“One encounters the self, one’s autobiography” (ibid). The researcher is both researcher and participant in her own study and in so doing “These forces come together and form a question” (ibid).

This inquiry started with a desire to put into words a feeling in my stomach that something needed saying. I was holding the feeling that something didn’t feel right, it hadn’t for years, but there was no time to attend to that in my exhilarating career, although I knew it was something to do with understanding and feeling understood.

When Declan died I could no longer sidestep it. It manifested initially in the feeling that others seemed to handle grief better than I did. After several years I could still dissolve into uncontrollable tears. I was a mother now and I didn’t want to pass on what I perceived as poor mental health about what had gone wrong and anxiety about what could go wrong, to my boys.

I also wanted to look to a brighter future, return to work with less distraction and a new found wisdom that all this experience had afforded me.

As I tried to articulate the feeling in words I read the following quote in a friend’s Masters dissertation:

“Certainly in order to be able to go out to the other you must have the starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself.” (Buber, 1975, p. 24)

So I started to be “with” myself.

My methods in this stage seemed to focus on getting out of my cognitive mind and

into my emotional mind. To notice myself as an observer might notice me, without immediate judgement or meaning making, how I responded in everyday life and interacted with the world around me and to look for patterns that would recur. I looked back over my working life and created a biography of events that stuck in my mind, feeling that if they were still whirring round in my head then I still had something to learn from them.

I exposed myself to experiences that felt typically uncomfortable; challenging authority figures, choosing to feel myself worth of a point of view in an area where I might not have expert knowledge. A conversation with Professor Bill Critchley provoked a familiar pattern of feeling hurt without the ability to articulate that hurt. He mooted the point that Consultants may do more harm than good, this became my first case study. I was familiar with not wanting to challenge an authority figure, fearful of entering a territory without all the facts at my fingertips, of showing my ignorance, of not being able to match quotes from learned texts in support of my argument. I was curious to know why despite these familiar inhibitors, in this instance I chose to plough on, insisted on being heard by whatever means were at my disposal.

I joined a running club as I found opening myself up to new possibilities seemed to be accompanied by high levels of adrenalin coursing through my system. I noticed how my running was affected by my mood, how it felt to be alone sometimes as the other runners were much more experienced and I often found myself alone at the back of the pack, but how much I appreciated their support and camaraderie and encouragement. The possibility of whole body knowing, or knowing that wasn't in my conscious mind, that hadn't arisen from cognitive processes began to unfurl.

The running track, known locally as The Thicket, became a place of outstanding beauty that reminded me of the natural rhythm of nature and my place in it, the cycle of the seasons that seemed to mirror my inquiry highs and lows and gave me faith that a hard winter could be followed by a fruitful spring. The camaraderie of the running club when I have previously loathed all sport caused me to examine and think more closely about the truths I had constructed for myself and what it was like not being the ‘best’ or most academically able, of not being in control of outcomes but allowing myself to be embraced and supported by those around me; my fellow runners, nature and the pattern of the seasons.

In a conversation with Fritjof Capra I heard myself saying;

RPC: My dissertation subject is uppermost in my mind.

FC: And what is it?

RPC: It’s founded in dialogue, it’s a DProf about the practice of Organisational Consulting. My belief is that dialogue is how we move anything forward.

FC: So your thesis is to emphasise dialogue in what context?

RPC: The particular context for me is that in the I-Thou moments of relating my mind thinks very much in images rather than words and I want to see if there is anything in that? Is there anything in these images that enriches or enhances or makes dialogue easier such that if we can then have better dialogue might we achieve more?

And in an encounter with a very strong mental image of a Red Acrylic Egg (see case study 11) in a seminar group, an image that I hadn’t choicefully conjured up, which took me as much by surprise as my fellow students, I found I could make myself clearly and generatively heard in a potentially difficult and emotional conversation and felt very clear about what I wanted to say.

I engaged with the world like a wide-eyed child, the naivety that I had previously been rather self-critical about started to feel like a part of my consulting offer. My ability to show up with a fresh pair of eyes and with no foregone conclusions, was as helpful to my inquiry as my practice, although I had a perspective that clients seemed to want me for expertise and answers.

My title for the Inquiry became “Metaphysical Consulting”. I had heard Adrian Moore (Professor of Philosophy – Oxford University) describe Metaphysics as “the most fundamental attempt to make sense of things” so my inquiry topic became to find out how do I make sense of things?; myself, what is going on with my clients, how I share my understanding and what we want from our interventions and indeed, lives.

I became increasingly attached to this title when I shared it with others; some people thought I was talking about the philosophical school of Metaphysics and others thought my work had a mystical or occultish dimension. As I was still exploring, this was really helpful for a couple of reasons; in keeping with the Heuristic tradition I was open to all possibilities, I wasn’t ruling any paradigm in or out in the quest for new knowledge. Reason describes Action Research as “promiscuous” in its sources of theoretical inspiration (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 3). It later became Metacognitive Consulting when it became clear I was thinking about my thinking and not the whole of reality. Although I am espoused to Dialogue and wanted to discover meaning making in a participatory context, i.e. with others not on my own, I was doubting the reliability of language as a tool to creating shared understanding and so was looking for a way to make my thinking accessible in the way I intended it.

Whereas I went into this stage of my inquiry thinking it was about Mental Imagery, when I came out of it I felt I really needed to explore the whole orientation that enabled me to practice in this way and what learning was there in this massive life change that I could explore that would heal me and help others.

## **Immersion**

“Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states...to live it...to grow in knowledge ...People, places, meetings, readings, and nature – all offer possibilities for understanding the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

In Immersion I wanted to return to the state I was in when I had just been bereaved. There is some feeling of having become a newborn, all the learning of life had been stripped away, that which nature gave me was still there but nurture had been eradicated, everything that I felt identified me - my husband, my future plans, my work, my mortgage, my chances of becoming a mother in the future, were gone.

There was a freedom about that, who was I? What might I become? Like a baby in a sea of potentiality with the cognitive skills of a 32 year old. I wanted to get back to that raw state without the accompanying distress because the permeability and deconstruction that it yielded was one of the most immense learning experiences of my life and that felt like fertile ground from which to grow my inquiry.

Moustakas advocates following one's energy and intuition in pursuit of tacit knowledge that may further the Inquirer in living the experience of their inquiry.



Methods at this stage included seeking companionship surfacing patterns in my behaviour by cooking, painting, photography, listening to other people's conversations and walks in nature.

I sought to find out what my subconscious mind knew through automatic writing. I wandered off like a toddler trying to park all judgement or analysis and absorb just what is, writing poetry, drawing, continuing to pursue experiences that were not harmful but uncomfortable and experimenting with meditative state of mind referred to as the Theta state. I interviewed former clients to find out if what they valued about working with me and basically challenged everything I thought I knew about myself.

I signed up for a course at Schumacher College, a place I had visited during my masters. The environment there is very natural, free of distracting pollutants and contaminants, my vegetarian principles are fully endorsed there, all possibilities are embraced. There are forests and trees and streams. It somehow reminds me of the place in Wales where we holidayed as children, I felt safe there and able to open up and it was running a course on the marriage of Art and Science. I was hoping that I would find a place somewhere along this continuum.

The course was run by Fritjof Capra, who was already inspiring me through his writing, and Peter Adams, a brilliant sculptor whose work includes benches and places for dialogue. Midweek on the course Ian McGilchrist was giving a talk on his book *The Master and his Emissary*, which examines how ideas about the left and right brain could be applied in contemporary settings. I had the experience I sought, albeit unexpectedly.

I had an experience something like shamanic journeying which I journaled;

*“In the evenings we are invited to give presentations on our special areas of interest. Dave gives a presentation on sound as a radio producer and plays us some Theta waves, I start to feel myself tilt forward, my stomach cramps so severe that it brings my knees up, as if watching myself I realise I am going into a foetal position. I feel strange, on the one hand I want to stop it because I fear people looking at me, but I am also curious about what is going on. I feel myself falling forwards towards a dark tunnel. I ask about it and immediately get up to stand by Richenda our facilitator, a Shaman. Several people are staring at me, I say I have to leave the room, this is too uncomfortable, a participant observes that the Theta wave is like the foetal heartbeat and this may have triggered a molecular memory. Not knowing what to make of all this or even what some of these words mean, I say I have to leave, I ask Jim to come with me. We sit in the garden while I nurse labour pains, turn to Jim as if he was my mate.”*

**Figure 7 The Schumacher Experience**

I recall feeling from this experience that at the same time as I am giving birth I was myself being born.

The connection to the fellow student remains, it was unlike anything I had known, when I described it to my supervisor she suggested he was my Cosmic Twin. We have journeyed on together throughout this inquiry, arriving at the same points by entirely different routes, this made me appreciate the level of connection to other

people that is possible if both sides are willing. I tried automatic writing to better understand this connection:

So we said we would sit up all night and talk and you said we should get some bedding because it would be cold and I said I would make cocoa because I already love you and want to care for you and you came back with 2 yoga mats and one blanket and I thought “erm? That’s not what I expected” and then we curled up like two dormice or a kindle of kittens into each other and I had my back to you and you complained that my bum was cold and you laughed because I still had my shoes on and said my hair was good to scratch your nose on and I said “Do you have a lot of success with women?” and then you stroked my left temple. Very Tenderly. And you put your arms around me and held me and I watched flames dancing in the fire and Oh I gave You my Heart. So what do I do now? Hunt for you? Stalk you because you touched something in me and withdrew leaving me in the best Music Hall Tradition of “wanting more”? I already carry you around my con-joined twin – sharing a brain that dances with scintillating blue sparkles of light. The truth is that our heads are fused but our bodies are a long way apart and while we both want to go in separate directions I can feel the tugging and splitting and aching of bone and tight skin as we try to pull our heads asunder. It’s exhausting and fruitless. If they separate Us, one of Us dies

**Figure 8 Inquiring with Automatic writing**



Figure 9 The Kiss, Gustav Klimt 1908-09

This writing gave me several pieces of data, it has a rhythm, in the painting the lovers are somewhat dichotomous, together forming a whole, a space was created in which this connection formed, slightly awkward at the start then the strong bond of



relationship. The critical voice is familiar, the energy builds rapidly from unexpected care-giving encounter to absolute devotion and in that process mirrors how I came to feel about my inquiry, by the end of it the lovers are inseparable. The painting seemed to complement it so perfectly, it captures the moment I was lying in the long grass at Schumacher feeling myself to be in labour and comforted by Jim. I thought it was about Jim when I started writing it, others read it and thought it was about Declan, at the end it was about my Inquiry. I think it doesn't matter, it was about striving for a sense of wholeness.

Writing about this is my attempt to show absolute honesty and authenticity in this inquiry, no matter how embarrassed or incredulous my hope is to encourage others to explore the recesses of their minds and their less comfortable or conforming experiences without judging themselves the way I might have previously judged myself or made meaning of this experience.

This experience had occurred following the Theta wave experiment and I later find that the Theta state is the cross over between conscious and subconscious states, is most present in young children and is capable of profound healing. In the Theta state people typically report that their intuition and gut feeling is stronger and that they get their best ideas, writers write better. It's a hypnotic state.

I had experienced this surreal feeling before when I had attended Arthur Findlay Spiritualist college to try to make sense of some experiences that occurred around the time of my husband's death. I revisited the college not sure what I was looking for but just to reconnect to the feeling, I took my children with me and they played happily in the grounds. I was greeted warmly and it was a beautiful sunny day but a

little voice in my head played on a continual loop; “the answer doesn’t lie here, the answer doesn’t lie here....”

I could also recall that sometimes this state was attained in the most connected moments with my clients, when I would lose a sense of myself and merge with others. This loss of dualism and blurring of physical boundaries led me into the work of Maslow, Grof and Rowan and led me to want to incorporate aspects of Transpersonal psychology which seemed to capture some sense of what I was experiencing.

This pursuit of the Theta state is also achieved through the use of the psychedelic drug Mescaline, as documented by Aldous Huxley in his book *The Doors of Perception* (Huxley, 1954). Whilst I confess to a curiosity, the same intuition that prevented me taking anti-depressants when bereaved led me to eschew what I perceived as a short cut and to concentrate my efforts on my own naturally occurring internal resources. The inspiration for the book title came from the writing of the mystic and poet William Blake;

“If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, til he sees all things through the narrow chinks of his cavern”

**Figure 10 William Blake *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell***

This led me to examine Mysticism where it seemed quite comforting to find in the writing of Evelyn Underhill that the whole of my life experience might have some purpose in training my conscious mind to overthrow the traditional educative

training, that there might be some greater good to be attained in this inquiry aside from my own healing if I were to stop being “so anxiously acquisitive of the crumbs and lift my eyes to the whole loaf” (Underhill E. , 2010, p. 23). Underhill describes the Mystic as the person seeking union with Reality through an “interpenetration of it and ourselves” (Underhill E. , 2010, p. 10).

I threw it out to my family and they sent me newspaper cuttings, book references, anything they came across that appeared to mention words they had heard me say, they also started to refer to it as my “away with the fairies dissertation”, but I notice I was not swayed by their opinion, another first.

I wrote a poem as a way of saying goodbye to the participants of the Schumacher course, it brings in experiences from everyone on the course;

### **I shall see you again**

I shall see you again, if not face-to-face then in the beauty of nature  
Kind gestures and warm embraces  
I shall see you again in long walks and heartfelt conversation  
I shall see you again  
When I can listen to some music without medical intervention  
When its seems there's hardly anything Gail's not prepared to mention  
When my left brain has read the map home and my right has got the joke

When Everything I thought about Austrians has now gone up in smoke  
When I find beauty in the everyday but not forget to pay the bill  
When I can step out of the vortex of life and find a moment to be still  
If a cold numb bum becomes worth it because it means an open heart  
If in a circle I can Feel part of the whole and not wholly apart  
If I can recapture the sense of fun I had when I was ten  
Then truly I can say with feeling  
I shall see you all again.

Figure 11 Reawakening my creativity

This poem reminded me that I had a creative side that I hadn't given much space to in recent years and how much better I felt for doing that, a greater sense of being in balance internally. This started to raise issues about how much logical rational thinking I had been doing in recent years; privileging the thought processes that can be summed up as rational. It created a sense of inner peace to be able to balance it with emotional and intuitive knowing. I had always written poetry as a child so when and why did that dry up? The naïve inner child that I am increasingly affectionate towards appears in the poem and I start to feel that in this inquiry process I am re-growing myself from this point onwards, but in a way more congruent with my values.

When I need to have a rather difficult conversation because I felt some of my work was showing up in someone else's writing, I wanted to inquire into the validity of this



observation. I mean really inquire, not accuse. I wanted to have a dialogue in a space in which the conditions were not ideal because I felt like a trust value had been compromised.

I talked it over with my earlier Supervisor and she encouraged me to speak it out; I talked it over with a Psychotherapist that I had been seeing about Transpersonal Psychology and she asked me what I was afraid of about having this conversation. I tell her I am fearful of unleashing my inner 10 year old, rather than having a grown up conversation. I am going to appear to be stamping my feet and proclaiming “It’s not fair”. The therapist encouraged me to draw this little girl;



**Figure 12** My 10 year old as I imagined her

The therapist notices to me how very vulnerable and far away she is, clutching a teddy and dressed in nightclothes and she encourages me to draw her closer in. In doing so I notice how very off-centre she is.



**Figure 13** Bringing my 10 year old self closer in.

I start to become curious about this 10 year old girl, what was she telling me? I recall my sister's observations about what a fiercely independent child I had been. I had

had no trouble expressing my wants or needs then, I had multiple means of expression; poetry, writing, vegetarianism, music, taking myself off into nature when I should have been walking home from school. I could see I valued dialogue because I was so concerned about maintaining it in the conversation I wanted to have, and whereas I had always felt a bit awkward that I was a bit naive in my adult life and prone to foot stomping, I could see that this child had no trouble with her voice. She was complete in herself and sure of the ground she stood on. I started to embrace the inner child as a rich seam and she informed my inquiry as I read Maslow and how much he embraced the child's view of the world.

When I interviewed Fritjof Capra to find out what he thought about my inquiry I had noticed my increasingly confident voice. I was prepared take up the time of an authority figure even though I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to say. When discussing my inquiry I was speaking in a passionate and authentic voice.

I started to value and name Connection after the experience at Schumacher, when I spoke to former clients about what they had most valued about working with me and was amazed to find it wasn't my technical skills at all, what they most valued was the relationship they had with me. I was astounded by this, I thought it was technical skills that set me apart, they apparently thought the opposite. John Donne's Elegy "No man is an Island" went round and round my head and I started to pay attention to the things that were sticking, repeating or showing up in multiple forms. I went back over my journal notes from client experiences to see what this would evoke.



And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge. And he answered saying: Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.

You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams. And it is well you should. The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea; And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.

But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure; And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line. For self is a sea boundless and measureless. Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth." Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path." For the soul walks upon all paths.

The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

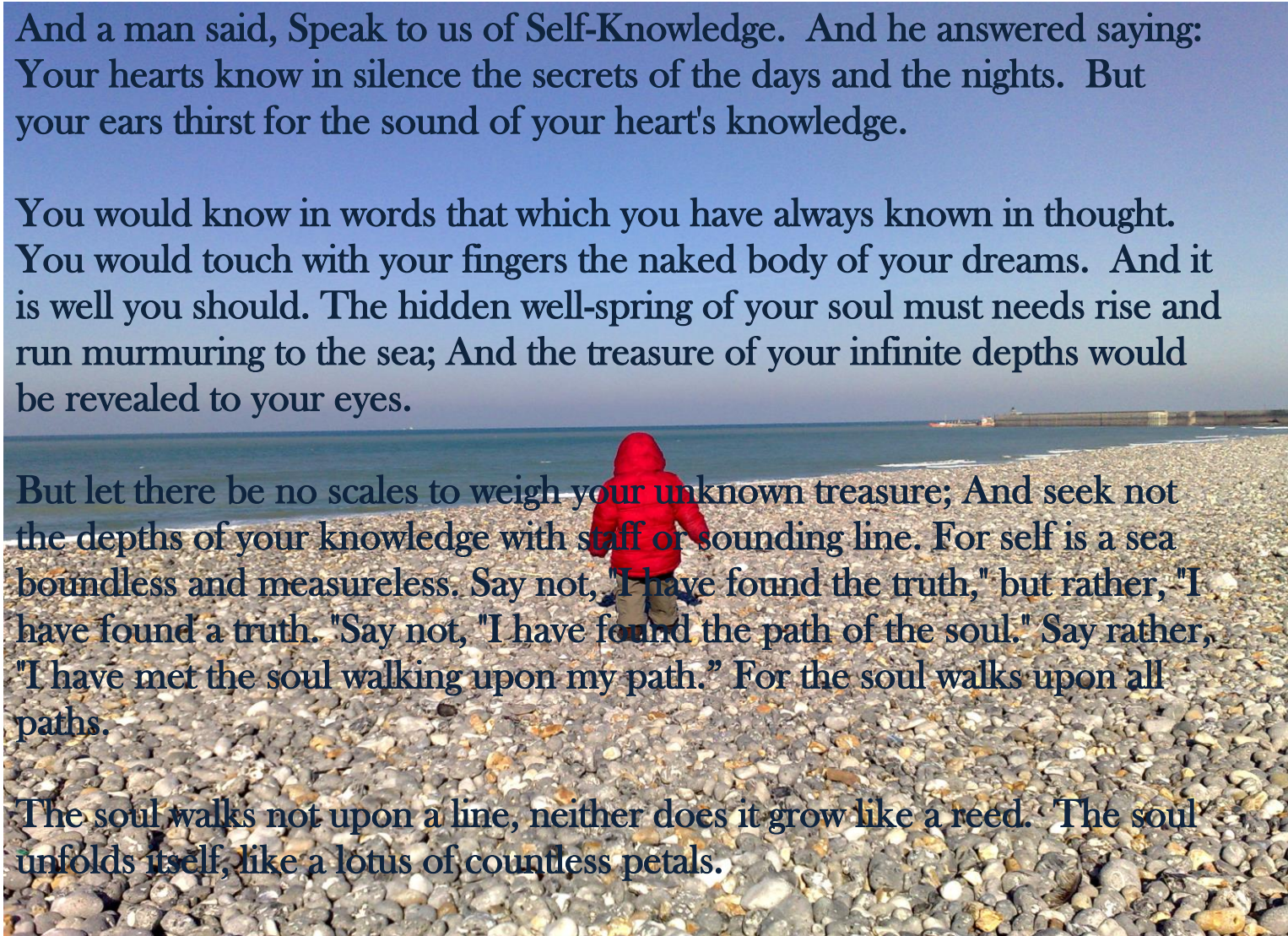


Figure 14 The Prophet by Khalil Gibran set against a fiercely independent toddler heading off over rocky terrain in an appealing direction. A metaphor for how I felt.

Clients valuing relationship with me, my inattention to my own needs for creative outlet, how to have good Dialogue, how I sought out the space at Schumacher into which I and my inquiry could blossom. I could hardly believe how rich my psychic life was and how little thought I had given to it. I decided to enter into this difficult

and uncharted territory in the hope that I could discover the essence of my consulting and encourage others to do the same. I started to gather stories, case studies, conversations, moments when Dialogue felt rich and productive. In order not to delude myself about the richness of these encounters, I inquired with friends, family and strangers that were working in similar territory, strangers that were totally unconnected to my field of inquiry. I handed it over to others to practice, with the intention that by working at many different points along this continuum of intimacy, I would create every opportunity to discover whether there was any real substance to how I was practising. This field work I collected into Case Studies and examined for themes and patterns.

During this period of immersion I had come to appreciate how I automatically employed many different ways of knowing, and rather than seek more positivist forms of knowing over using my intuition, I created what seemed like a portfolio of knowing, in which information could come from many sources to be put alongside each other.

When I received feedback that I didn't like the sound of a piece of my writing, I went into the tricky feelings it created. This is in the same way I invite clients into a safe space from which to explore what is troubling them, as I was forced to confront my own grief.

Upset and feeling alone, I woke up at 3am, sat and stared at the night sky, anxious that the feedback was a 'truth' (it did, after all, come from an authority figure) and that I wasn't up to the doctoral journey. I surprised myself by noticing these feelings didn't go deep, what ran deep inside my core was that I really had something to say

and that this faltering step was a test of my resilience. I try to enter a more meditative state by settling in the cool dark of the lounge and staring at the night sky.

This is an extract from my journal entry;

*“ What in an anxious state is bland and unresponsive becomes alive and swirling with colour as I relax and stop trying so hard to see it. Stars like little cosmic heartbeats start to show themselves. The less hard I try the more they appear. One particularly bright star holds my gaze more than any other, my mind and my eyes wander about the sky, I get momentarily distracted when the home from University students teem out of next door and trigger my security lighting but however hard I try and focus on something else, this star and I are engaged in a chat.”*

Figure 15 Starry night journal entry

This became a metaphor for my inquiry, the bright star in the night sky that gradually revealed itself. The other lines of inquiry that beckoned and winked and teased being the other stars simultaneously obscured and explicit amongst the different shades of colour and energy and possibility. The bright flash of the security lights and others voices cluttered my view momentarily, such is the paralysing effect of anxiety. In the briefest of encounters with a night-time sky, a richness of representation uncluttered a feverish mind. The distractions of other bright lights; the behaviours and mental models that were getting in the way of me and productive dialogue; my performance anxiety, my insecurities, my wish to be liked, urges to be helpful and be seen as such. Putting these things aside and a rich world of colour opens up in the inky, mauvy, jet and navy swirls of the night sky, literally and figuratively, a phrase I am particularly fond of. It's always darkest before the dawn I recalled, I start to see



that Van Gogh has something to teach me. I also noticed I have no name for the star, which was of no importance to me but might be important when trying to convey what it means to me, to other people. Understanding my mental models, where they had come from, became a rhizomatic off-shoot of my inquiry. A prospect I faced with some trepidation.



Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Figure 16, Starry Night, Vincent Van Gogh 1899**

“It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on the battlefield”.

W.B. Yeats



## Incubation

I had all this “stuff” whirling around in my head. The fieldwork into what felt like informing encounters and the immersion work seemed to have created a technicolour world that was part of my inquiry by virtue of the fact that I couldn’t get any of it out of my head.

The Schumacher experience; my intuited sense to go there, the space it created, reconnecting to poetry, painting and my 10 year old self, drawing her, drawing her in, cosmic twins, memories of being bereaved, having so much energy I had to run, waking at 3am my head full, being out in nature, finding myself acceptable, giving and receiving care, chance conversations, binaural rhythms creating the Theta state, what vegetarianism meant, Van Gogh, ways of knowing, embracing diversity, what came out when I wrote from the heart without being self-conscious, what came out when I was self-conscious and tried to sculpt the mental images that I was having, relationships with others and intense moments of connection. All in all I left Immersion with the strong sense that I had lost contact with myself, and that peace of mind would prevail if I could reconnect to my true nature. If I could find a way to practice that was congruent with my true nature I would be practicing with authenticity and would no longer struggle with the feeling that something wasn’t quite right.

To the outside world this must look like a very dry spell, in the classic sense it is not easy to appreciate that the heuristic inquirer is doing anything, but she is. The methods employed seem to be non-methods in that all of one’s efforts retreat and are focussed within contemplation and reflection.

“..the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question... During this process the researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic...incubation allows the inner workings...to continue to clarify and extend...discovery does not ordinarily occur through deliberate mental operations” (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 28-29). This was truly a pregnant pause.



Figure 17 Anatomical Studies, Leonardo da Vinci.

## Pregnant Pause



Delay in speech used to give one time to consider the consequences of a statement.

Urban Dictionary

There is a distancing about this stage. Like when one might go to sleep and wake up finding the subconscious has worked on an issue. Like when you can't find that thing you are looking for but change your thought processes from directed attention and the truth emerges. This stage reminded me so much of being pregnant. I used to marvel at the way that my conscious mind could decide to eat healthy food and folic acid supplements but I had no control over the miraculous process that was going on inside. Subconscious processes, not choicefully made, became a part of the inquiry and hence the emergence of Metacognition.

Staying true to the methodology and purposefully not studying in any sense that it would be classically recognised, this period could have looked very restful externally but inside I was in torment. Feeling sick, unable to sleep, willing something to emerge ideally not too painfully, this was more like being pregnant than I could have credited. Unable to write anything that didn't feel totally true and having lots of threads that on some level I "knew" were all coming together and telling me a story. There was tension in this phase caused by the doctoral programme. A deadline was looming and I was required to deliver the Transfer Paper. The Transfer paper was intended to deliver proof that the student could transition from the standard expected of a Masters to the standard expected at Doctoral level. I learnt a lot about managing my own anxiety. As with babies, these things emerge in their own time when they are good and ready, not when the outside world dictates they should.

At this point in the inquiry I made a mistake; I conformed to the prevailing culture, much as I had in my early career. I conformed to the deadline of producing a transfer paper at a time when my inquiry was ripe but incomprehensible.

Feedback was that I needed to work much harder in order to make myself understood. Finding out how wounding it was to me not to be understood I went into an angry tailspin that invited sarcasm and judgement in return. This unexpected event would, I feel, have derailed a more prescriptive methodology whereas following Moustakas approach, every event that occurs on the journey of the inquiry becomes a part of the inquiry and fertile ground for potential learning. This was knowledge in action and I wanted to make sense of it.

I became extremely self-conscious that my inquiry was not worthy of consideration. I became paralysed with no idea where to turn. Hurt that I felt the panel had not made much effort to get on board with my work, I responded with anger. I didn't recognise the voice I heard coming out of me and was surprised to find how much passion was in it.

The relationship I had with one of the viva panel meant that she gave me a dialogic hand up to help the other members of the panel see there was value to my work.

I came to understand the value of incubation, the difference between paralysis and contemplation.

Unfortunately, the impact had far reaching implications, I lost my way, felt discouraged, lost the energy for writing and submitted a first draft that, from the tone of the feedback, invited the wrath of the gods. I told myself I was going to give up. I

didn't need a doctorate to enhance my self-worth. I just needed to get back into life, find a new partner, develop my consulting business, act normal and I would be normal.

But then still that little voice. My sister sent me a book of life-saving poetry by Mary Oliver, it fell open at the page:

### The Journey

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice--  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
"Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late

enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do--  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.

Figure 18 Chance encounters with poetry that spurred me on

This single act of kindness reminded me how impactful small gestures can be in restoring flow, the power of the co-inquirer and the tendency I had to be try to be independent. Most importantly I came away feeling that in the culture of the education I had received, in the profession I had pursued, the cultures of the organisations I had worked for, in striving to fulfil the dreams of the man I had married, even in this small gesture of privileging the doctoral deadline over my own readiness I may have gained immense satisfaction, recognition, approval and love but I had lost my voice. I was faced with a choice, to regain my voice and risk losing all

those things, to continue with conformity and swallow down the uncomfortable feelings or to try to find a way to navigate the middle ground, incorporate many different viewpoints to the exclusion of none. I was worried that an inquiry into finding my own voice had the potential to be outrageously self indulgent but as Mary Oliver’s poem showed me, there is only one life I can really save. I can only hope the example encourages others to attend to their own inner voice, that in navigating my way through grief others will appreciate there is a way through some of our darkest moments and deepest sufferings.

## **Illumination**

“The process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).



**Figure 19** Twinkling expressions of past loss and future hope in a prayer room.

I worry when I read this that I might have confused Incubation with Illumination, but there is data in that feeling of having got something wrong, I’m very familiar with it; “it is just such missed, misunderstood, or distorted realities that make their



appearance and add something essential to the truth of an experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30).

If Incubation is the pregnancy, then Illumination is the period of confinement. The time traditionally allowed to women to overcome the rigours of pregnancy and childbirth.

In Illumination the researcher expects to find clusters of themes occurring, “Illumination opens the door to a new awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30).

The experience I had with the transfer viva panel was a useful test of whether I was obtaining the change that I was seeking in myself. I felt misunderstood by the panel. When I submitted what I believed was my final thesis only to have it apparently rejected whole scale I felt surprise, a sense of failure and anger at my college for not guiding me more.

It was a confrontation with authority figures, and it was about not feeling understood. About feeling a trust had been betrayed, so I might have expected the old me to back away as a gamut of personal buttons was pressed. The old me might have hoped to have found a logical, rational, calm place from which to make a case for myself, or might have felt the emotional response and been too embarrassed to show it. Instead of beating a hasty and yet, in my mind, dignified retreat that wouldn't have resolved anything, I initially attempted a dialogue in order to explain. I set up a couple of meetings to try and have this conversation but I had no energy for them and they fell away.

I stayed with the discomfort however, enabled by the pre-existing relationship I had with at least two of the panel.

The method employed in this phase was mainly one of extensive dialogue, some with other people but mainly with myself, and reflecting on what it took to have good dialogue with myself.

Initially I needed some time, some space in which to evaluate whether it was worth pressing on, to recover. I discussed it with others around me with whom I had close relationships. Hoping to hear something that felt right, that would bring peace to my inner turmoil. The care and concern of others relieved the sense of embarrassment that I had got something wrong, this relieved my paralysing self-consciousness and got me back into flow. I knew really I would need to look within to find the answer and all I had to go on was this passion that had manifested in so many ways, in the effort I had put in and the feelings it had aroused in me. It couldn't be "nothing" if it made me feel like this.

I sought to regain a sense of balance, my emotions were high, my writing was emotional and poetic and as a consequence largely incomprehensible to anyone who hadn't journeyed alongside me. I wanted to convey the extraordinary experience of this inquiry. To not honour the energy, connections and coincidences felt disrespectful and unappreciative of the gift that was my inquiry. My handling of the matter had been clumsy but it was impassioned, I could see I was transitioning from one way of being to another, following my energy, feelings, feeling worthy of defending myself, not silenced by a world that was alien to me. Looking at this experience in this way felt like I was making the move to a new way of being in the

world. This was the transpersonal change I sought for myself, the permanent shift in consciousness referred to by Boucouvalas (see Literature Review).

Staying with rather than retreating from this experience enabled me to move forward and make choices.

I had to make a decision, did I want to privilege the mystical nature of the universe or did I want to be understood? To be understood meant grounding myself, writing with structure and form, attendance to the rules of grammar. This was, after all, a doctorate, the examiner wasn't looking for a personal reflective journal.

Finding myself worthy of such consideration gave me the satisfaction of knowing that I was making progress towards the personal goals of achieving a greater sense of myself, my voice and peace of mind.

The experience of surfacing the inquiry felt tempestuous and uncontainable. Moustakas says this can be the nature of heuristic study, it may be "disturbing and even jarring" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13), full of unexpected and to me inexplicable coincidences and connections and I wanted to impart something of the experience of that whilst also being conscious that I had noted in a journal entry;

"The problem is there can be too much movement and the personal disturbance is so great it's uncontainable and paradoxically leads to paralysis"

About this time I visited Amsterdam and I was captivated by a visit to the Van Gogh museum and his painting of irises, he had written about its beauty as coming not from mixing the colours up but from laying them alongside each other. This was how I

felt and I enjoyed the sense of being almost led to solutions and findings when I relinquished control and immersed myself in what seemed like a river of inquiry with many tributaries. I felt literally in flow and this helped to me recognise later when I wasn't.



Figure 20 Les Iris, Vincent Van Gogh 1889

I'm making a philosophical theory of Van Gogh's commentary, that my role as a consultant and my job in this inquiry is to make it safe and possible to bring conflicting ideas together so that they can be harmoniously alongside, each validating the other, needing to co-exist in order to exist, flourishing when they are in balance, failing when they are not. Like Niels Bohr's theory of Complementarity in which the



mutually exclusive wave and particle explanations of light are necessary in order to understand it.

I spoke with a colleague about a One Culture programme that states the values that should be in place at a major broadcasting organisation and she tells me it is largely ignored and set aside. I am interviewed by a potential client to discuss why their One Culture programme is not working in the merging of 4 Health Authorities into one and my challenge to them both is why should one culture be the aim of any organisation when a mutually respectful, diverse collective of individuals can surely demonstrate so much more creativity and agility?

Matthew Taylor in his annual RSA lecture states his truths and in his truly dialogic perspective invites rebuttal to his perspective in pursuit of other truths. This to me is what balance gives us, self awareness of our mental models and personal imbalances to be sufficiently at ease with ourselves that we can embrace other truths, enter into a Dialogic space with the ability to put different perspectives side by side, respectful of both. This is a key aspect of my consulting when we are trying to create new ideas and apply novel thinking to age old problems that keep us stuck in the past. Like the slide rule manufacturer who thought the key to a sustainable business would be ever more refined slide rules, sometimes our thinking needs the creativity to see the possibilities.

I enjoyed the mutuality and sense of connection with all manner of co-inquirers; alive or dead, animate or inanimate. I enjoyed the sense of adventure that the inquiry was giving me, the benefit of following one's energy and noticing when things felt effortful.

I pulled myself out of the clouds, cashed in my pension plan so that I could afford to carry on, found a straight talking supervisor and started to write again, from a much more grounded place.

For the first time I sense that my feelings about getting things wrong don't stack up. My projects were successful, I was hugely popular with clients, my most respected boss at KPMG wrote this about me;

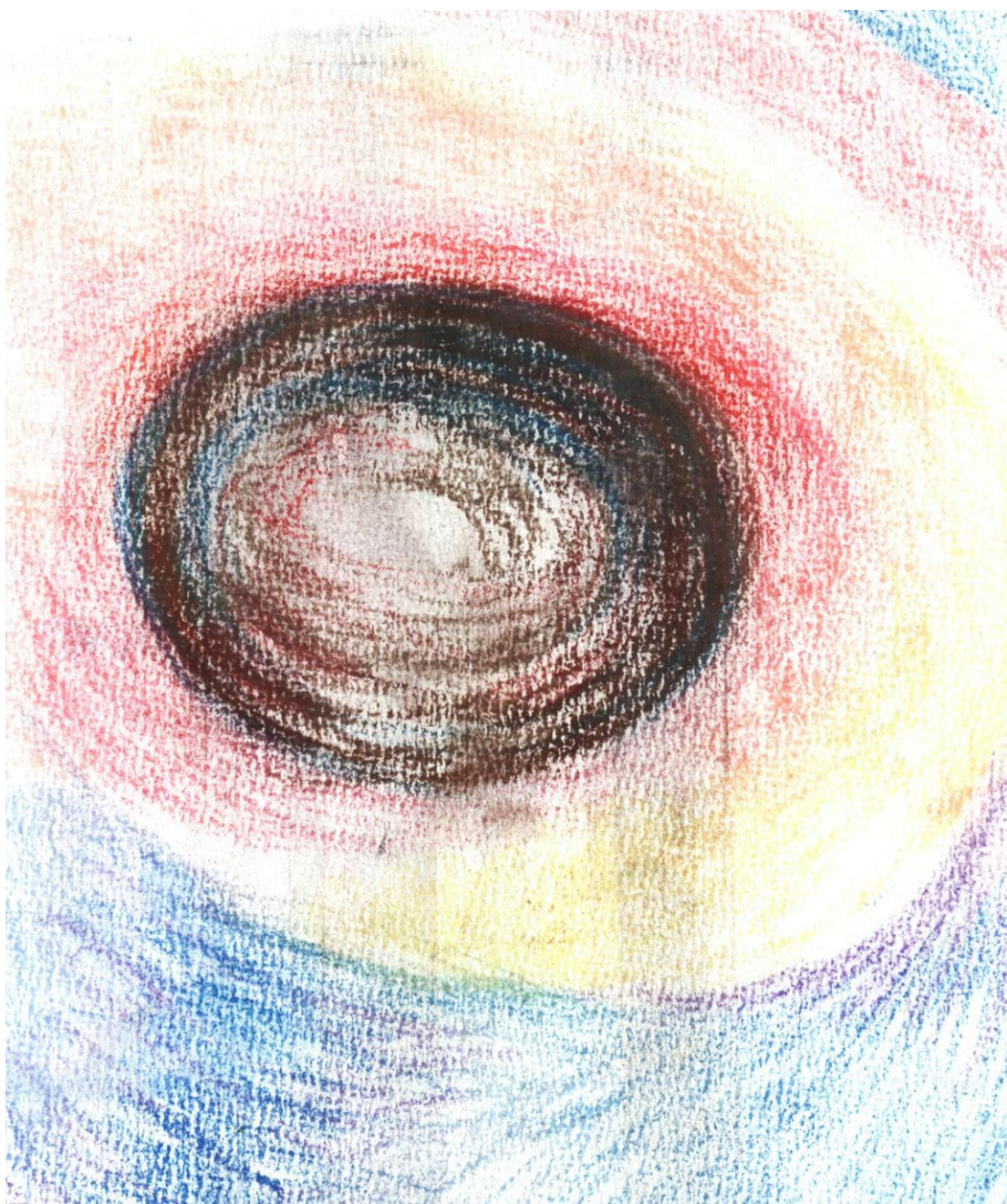
“Given that I have hired Rosemary 3 times, I have to conclude that I rate her very highly! Seriously though, Rosemary is a first-class senior delivery and pre-sales consultant. She is an accomplished project manager and has excellent knowledge and experience of implementing SAP and has a strong financial background. I reviewed Rosemary's work at clients and she always had superb feedback due to her expertise and the fact she is also highly personable”  
September 3, 2009 Paul Bray, Partner, KPMG managed Rosemary at KPMG

Figure 21 LinkedIn recommendation from my former boss

I have loads of qualifications, I've never failed an exam, I have faced and survived enormous life trauma, I have organised myself financially to pay my own way through a Masters and Doctorate whilst also staying at home to be a 'proper mom'. I have had the courage not to compromise on my relationships and to go it alone in a culture where this is not easy. I have won contracts on my own merits and on the strengths of the relationships I have built and I have fabulous friends and close family relationships, I'm a good cook and people perceive me as caring and intuitive. What measures of success was I looking for to feel that I was succeeding? What was that black gnawing hollow feeling at the centre of my soul that left me feeling whatever I

did wasn't enough? Why were the external shows of success not being felt on the inside? Which was reality? Mmm, what's the data in feeling annoyed?

Whilst holding a space in which to make sense of the inner turmoil, I continued with the other leg of my inquiry and drew the themes I was surfacing in the small case studies into a way of working that I could experiment with in the large studies. I bridged what seemed like a giant gap between the small intimate conversations to the larger work by having a master class with my cohort.



**Figure 22** My intention was to create a pastel of the strands of my inquiry blending harmoniously, ended up looking like a necrotic sore.



## Explication

“The purpose of Explication is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31).

Explication is a phase of concentrated attention when comprehensive depiction is given to the themes of the inquiry. The main method employed in Explication is Indwelling and focussing, clearing an inward space.

The indwelling surfaced for myself the need to work with absolute authenticity and with my whole self. The themes that have come out for my practice are informed by the separation between intellect and feeling that I seem to have treated as either/or choices rather than components in a search for understanding.

“the discrepancy between intellect and feeling, which get in each other’s way at the best of times, is a particularly painful chapter in the history of the human psyche” (Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 2009, p. 66).

I find a greater sense of wellbeing when reconnecting with my creative side after a lengthy period of logical work; I feel grounded if I do grounded activity after a bout of creativity; I start to appreciate the sense of equilibrium a balance of activities can provide. This informs my drive to create balance in my interventions such that all views are represented and all voices heard.

## Creative Synthesis

“The researcher in this process is thoroughly familiar with all the data in its major constituents, qualities and themes and in the explication of the meanings and details of the experience as a whole” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31).

In Creative Synthesis I needed to bring together the themes that arose as part of my character and synthesise them with the themes that arose when I felt I was doing my best work. In this way I am hoping to create a consistent and authentic model that is good for me and good for my practice.

“We begin to sense the possibility that there may be a purpose after all to the human journey: the deepening sense of selfhood, the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains of reality and the expansion of human consciousness, is the transcendent process by which we explore the mystery of existence and discover new realms of meaning.” (Rifkin, 2009, p. 40).



**Figure 23 The Thicket Path**

I did not know I was on a search for passionate aliveness.

I only knew I was lonely and lost and that something was drawing me deeper beneath the surface of my life in search of meaning.

There is a hunger in people to go to those deep depths;

to know that our lives are sacred;

that our hearts are truly capable of love.

It is a yearning to be all that we can be.

A longing for what is real.

— Anne Hillman

**Figure 24 Why I started this inquiry**

### **3. My Self – or how I went about things before I realised it wasn't working**

This section is about the life I led prior to being widowed.

This life had all the superficial hallmarks of success - money, career progression, stuff. My purpose in writing about this life is highlight although I found many aspects rich and rewarding, when faced with the major fundamentals of life these constructs of success served very little purpose. These stories serve several purposes:

- they reconnect me to what I find important, lead me to rediscover a sense of my core that in my previous life I had rather lost contact with.
- They show me how little attempt I made to learn from the experiences I had, and how I was able to move upwards and onwards rather than indwell in any real discomfort. In the absence of any reflection I tended to repeat patterns of behaviour without any real understanding of why I was finding myself feeling hurt and my intentions misunderstood. I missed the opportunity for rich learning by reflecting upon what caused the dissonance. An oversight I am attempting to put right now.
- By examining how I practiced before my life changed beyond recognition. I am identifying the aspects of that life that I want to bring into the new.
- I can identify the aspects of my former practice that no longer serve.
- They provide stimulus for the very rich human experiences that are possible that I want to draw into a future way of working.
- They highlight to me that I feel I have connected to a truth when I feel it at an emotional level rather than an intellectual one.



In my old practice I was a qualified accountant who implemented IT systems across Europe. The soundtrack changes here as I unfurl myself like this Rose of Jericho to the steady unfolding rhythm of the major chord.



**Figure 25 The Rose of Jericho.** A dry plant that in the absence of water appears dead but is in fact curled up to protect the seeds that lay within. I use it as an analogy of myself until the water of the doctoral process enabled me to unfurl, shed my seeds and blossom again.

### *True Nature*

Up until the age of about 10 I am writing poetry, I am swimming in rivers, running through meadows, painting and making all manner of cakes. I have mice and gerbils and hamsters and cats with varying degrees of success. I am a passionate vegetarian animal lover, I tell everyone I want to be a vet, I'm going to church 6 times a week, the vicar thinks I'm going to become a nun. This love of nature, creativity and spirituality has endured, albeit sometimes consumed by my professional life spent being ferried between offices, airports and hotel rooms as a Consultant working in IT.

I choose a Secondary education based on its Musical legacy and fortunately my church going fervour secures me a place in this collegiate school. We attend Eucharist on a regular basis, the sound of the deep reverberating bell that serves to remind us a miracle is taking place, moves me to tears.

Unable to say “no” I take on more A level subjects than I can handle until one night when it all gets too much and I flee, leaving dreams of becoming a vet, or a doctor in ragged, flappy tatters behind me.

I went to a sixth form college and I met Declan; they say when you meet the man you are going to marry you just “know” and it’s true, you do. These are the fleeting moments of absolute wisdom and I want to find a way to connect to them more often. The girls that used to bully me for my swottish behaviour at school turn out to be friends of his. Seeing me as his girlfriend they start to reevaluate me, they think he’s great - they see me in a new light, the start of a life made easier with him in it, begins.

I embark on a Business Studies degree, I have no money but I am totally happy. I emerge blinking into the light wishing I had done Sculpture, but it’s too late now, I’m onto a Graduate scheme with the National Rivers Authority, training to become an Accountant.

Totally at ease with an organisation dedicated to preserving the nation’s rivers, I get great peace from being near water. I get seconded to Head Office and start a trek round Britain looking at the Authority’s projects, evaluating them on value for money grounds.

In my hard hat and thigh length waders I am walked through a flood defence installation in Manchester, it’s a complex and massively expensive engineering project.



As the senior engineer and I walk and talk whilst pushing against the fast flowing river, I enjoy how atypical for an accountant it is to be out there fully immersed, literally and figuratively, in the business and how much I am enjoying this whole mind and body experience, the people I work with are passionate about preserving the natural habitat.

### *Communion*

In the moment of receiving a proposal of marriage I respond with absolute certainty. I know that the answer is yes. I am fearful of commitment or being bound to something or someone with no reasonable means of escape, yet I know that this man and I are each other's family. I am anxious about the ceremony, the pomposity of having my Banns read, the expense of paying an ecclesiastical court an extra £300 because someone forgot to read them. I am terrified at the prospect of being the centre of attention for the day, cannot imagine how I will make it down the aisle without either vomiting, fainting or crying uncontrollably. The anticipation is making me ill yet there is that knowing that it's the right thing to do. The day comes, it is not the day I've been dreaming of since I was a little girl, I harbour no such romantic nonsensical notions.

I'm standing outside the church with my Dad, he asks me if I would like to lay my hand on top of his as we enter. Baulking at such formality, I ask him why we can't just be normal and we enter the church holding hands like any Dad would with his little girl. The doors open and my soon to be new brothers-in-law are grinning down the nave at me like Cheshire cats, I feel my tension lifting. I enter the church, I can't see anything of the building; not the flowers, not the pretty architecture, the font where I had been baptised 26 years earlier, all I know is this golden sunlit space

created by guests happy and pouring out positive energy, the room is alive, 120 smiling faces full of warmth sweep me along and all I can feel is love and my husband's sweaty nervous palm as he gives my hand a reassuring squeeze when I get to the top of the aisle. I had no idea a space could feel like this, that love and positivity could pour out of people in such a tangible way and whenever I sense the atmosphere of a room now I am looking for the metaphorical equivalent of that warm golden light. I have a benchmark for the feeling of absolutely authentic connection, the very real experience of holding a space open and filling it with love.

I leave the church 35 minutes later, rather than the expected feeling I have had to survive some ritualistic ordeal, I find I have undergone a totally spiritual transformation, my soul feels utterly bound to this wonderful man, 'til death did us part.

### ***The Bank***

I've loved my time at the Rivers Authority but I am young, naive, and feel successful and slightly amused that I can attract a 40% pay rise in a single bound as if this reflects my personal worth. I don't realise the value of the non-monetary reward of the work at the NRA, I fail to realise there is anything special about this place. At one point I remember telling someone that I think I will live longer as a result of finding such happiness in my working life, but this was my first job from college, this was the happiness that the academic striving had been all about, but I didn't realise it might not always be that way.

In the battle between my head and my heart, my head is turned by the chance of a considerable uplift. I become Technical Manager at the Head office of a major bank. I am not confident when I take the job that they really want me - I don't have a great deal of belief in my ability to be a technical manager or deserving of this pay rise.

Figure 26 Imposter Syndrome Definition

**impostor phenomenon** or **fraud syndrome**, is a psychological phenomenon in which people are unable to [internalize](#) their accomplishments. Despite external evidence of their competence, those with the syndrome remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved. Proof of success is dismissed as luck, timing, or as a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more [intelligent](#) and competent than they believe themselves to be. - Wikipedia Sept 2014

I am supposed to be working between the IT department and End User to help each understand the others language. This is a typical model and one I have participated in at the Rivers Authority. Here, however, there is another layer that I am not used to, between IT and me lies a middle aged Scottish lion who seems to keep the keys to the IT department.

The gatekeeper and I have no dialogue, I find him aggressive, arrogant and obstructive. Not a good start. He thinks I don't understand technical matters, that I won't be able to explain things in terms programmers understand. This leaves me frustrated that language is being used to divide and separate, when my belief is there is always space for mutual understanding if both parties are prepared to try. I can't see what value he is adding. Dangling the keys at the gateway to IT he is spread too thinly to look after all the Technical managers vying for attention. Trying to work with this additional layer feels like some crazy version of organisational Chinese whispers, complicated, pointless. The opportunity to get things wrong with this extra link in the chain grows exponentially, the opportunity to fix miscommunication in a reasonable timescale diminishes with this thinly spread resource. I feel protective and loving towards my departmental clients, eager to make their lives easier, I care for them and see things very much from their perspective, I yearn for simplicity and a

transparent, straightforward approach. I notice simplicity plays a big part in all my work going forward.

Referring to the IT manager as a gateway and a lion I realise I am barely attributing human qualities to my former colleague. With my eye fixed firmly on the goal of getting a good outcome for my clients, I try to circumvent this obstacle. He complains to my boss that I am aggressive, my boss complains to me that I am seen as aggressive. I'm a 26 year old woman and I am utterly powerless in the face of these two more senior middle aged men who together have decided I am aggressive.

IT ----- IT interface -----Me ----- Customer

IT-----Me-----Customer

I didn't realise at the time how much my behaviour was a mirror of what was going on around. The consultant I become would use this as data, initiate a dialogue, challenge the assumptions and try to understand all perspectives, facing the discomfort this would undoubtedly involve, but my 26 year old self just feels I'm not adding any value. In this era, I had no concept of reflecting on mine and others behaviour. I responded at the time solely to my emotions, feeling hurt and with no concept I wouldn't be received as I intended, no idea of the social constructionists making mean together or George Meads idea that the meaning of the gesture was in the response or Donald Schon being Reflexive in the moment or Edgar Schein's argument that organisations should be aware of how they socialise. These learnings unfortunately didn't arise until my early 40s.

The three people I am sat with personify why this is not an environment in which I can thrive. I am bullied, sexually harassed and have to endure the hypocrisy and prejudice of a colleague who claims to be a devout Christian. A guy in the next bay

goes to prison for defrauding the photocopier contract, the investigation focuses on why he was not more tightly controlled. In my mind it seems just another symptom of a working environment where every man was for himself. A cultural norm for this industry that I feel gets borne out in the banking crisis of 2006.

There seems to be a working assumption that policy is the answer to everything, even a policy of how to deal with people who break down with stress, how to get them cleanly out of the office and when to send flowers.

Success in this environment depends on charisma and is measured by the number of windows you can see. None of this seems very important to me and I am concerned about what it might say about me if in my permeability I do start to trade in this ludicrous currency of windows.

I am not particularly proud of my own history here. It is perceived that there is capacity in my job to take on some classical accounting role and I take charge of submitting the Bank of England returns. It's the early days of spreadsheets and someone has built an incredibly complex system entirely in Excel designed to automatically generate the subsidiary balance sheets. I am in charge of a monster, it limps and stutters and stumbles along and accidentally I submit the same returns two months running. I am anxious to know what the repercussions will be, I feel sick and can't sleep. I don't feel able to admit my mistake, I feel like a fraud in this place, I am not proud of myself. It seems I can be dishonest too given the right conditions. The repercussions are nothing. This key document, this mechanism of control designed to prove the financial integrity and robustness of the balance sheet, shows itself as a pointless ritual. The spreadsheet is a meaningless artefact sucked into an airless void from which not even light can escape. Clearly no-one has looked at it, clearly it performs no role whatsoever, I am wasting my time.

I am uncomfortable on every level, I am suspicious of the organisation's motives, this over population of personnel, this striving to control through doctrine, policies for those that can't keep up the pace, trading for window space. Feeding back to me that I am aggressive. The whole thing feels dishonest and toxic, my authenticity is compromised. I become aware I cannot work well in an environment that is at odds with my values.

I just needed to go.

Anxious to escape I see a chink of light when I'm asked to join another company, a food company. I'm interested in food, I jump. The company has just gone live with a new system and they are building the team to run it, as MIS manager I'm going to head up the team. The implementation team are anxious to move away but with no training or documentation to read, the live team are nowhere near being able to take it on. The System lands like a grenade out of the trenches and the project team seem to be crouching with their fingers in their ears waiting for the bang. The system and my team can't cope with what is being asked of them, this state of the art, on-line, totally integrated system is gradually decoupled and disintegrated into a batch processing monolithic beast. They've bought a System for the year 2000 and are systematically taking it back to the 1970s.

Blame abounds. In these pre-etiquette days of Emails, missives are flying backwards and forwards **WRITTEN IN CAPITAL LETTERS TO PEOPLE WHO ARE SITTING THREE FEET AWAY**. I am rendered speechless, not only have we been lumbered with this untested, undocumented poorly thought out monster, my team is now being abused by the implementation team. All are cc'd in. How little relationship there was between us that they couldn't just come over and have a chat. In reality I wasn't in the mood to chat, I was too busy glaring back over the parapet at



them. Defending my battlements and throwing the odd pig to show we weren't starving. Anxious to appear we are coping, it's not our fault...

I lose team members to stress, I try to take on most of it myself. Having escaped from the bank rather than extracted the learning I find myself replaying that fiercely maternal protection that I showed to my banking client. We receive small lunch time training sessions on aspects of the system, how to post an invoice, other simple transactions but I see the futility of the exercise. The system as a whole is not working and no amount of demonstrating the individual parts are working is going to change that. I produce documents that show how every night we are falling further and further behind, nobody listens, no-one wants to hear bad news, this system is supposed to have been delivered all bright and shiny to the users and what I am showing them is beyond inconvenient. I am getting up 4-5 times a night to nurse this new born. I am frequently in the office at 5am, staggering home at 7pm and dialling up to carry on. Christmas day and I am cooking for the family with one hand, kicking off batch processes with the other, just as I have been doing day and night, 7 days a week for 18 months. I want to do all I can to show that what is required is a total overhaul, it's not that I'm not trying hard enough, there is a systemic failure that needs to be addressed, not a tinkering around the edges.

I can't continue with this folly, we can win neither the nightly battle nor the implementation war.

The marketing team are creating new recipes and every night they are spewing out thousands more errors as the system rejects these foreign invaders. When I try to preempt recipes - ask if we can set up material masters in advance - fix the errors at source, I create a diplomatic incident and get hauled over the coals by my manager. There is no dialogue between departments, no realism, no-one is seeing how it is for

the other side, there is no honesty. The ambitions, the timescales and the hoped for outcomes of consuming stock, one lettuce leaf at a time, are totally unrealistic in this technological climate. I can't get my head out of the batch processing long enough to convey this in a rational way, I'm tired and emotional, not in a good space, need to sleep and eat and take care of myself. At the Christmas party, which I am late attending because I am alone in the office restarting ailing batches, my manager tells me I 'look like shit'. I feel I have failed, trying to protect my team by taking on most of the night shifts myself has taken its toll.

Declan patiently awaits the return of his wife but even he is getting a little jaded by listening to me barking programming instructions. I am exhausted, paralysed and have run out of ideas to get this organisation to acknowledge something needs to change. Only when it appears that the external audit is at risk of being qualified, our Accountants can give no assurance that the financial results vomited by the system are in any way a true or fair reflection of the state of the company, does anyone decide enough is enough.

### *Out of darkness cometh light*

I swallow the demon that's pointing at me and jumping up and down saying this is all your fault, could I have done something more or differently? I regret trying so hard to make it work. I wish I had stayed in better shape in order to have more grown up conversations about what was going wrong, taken a more holistic view and seen the futility of the approach. Would I have been listened to if I had been less emotional and exhausted? I'm not sure this would have made any difference and it seems to be against my nature not to try my very hardest. It's clear to me that it's never just a job. I get the opportunity to join KPMG. I tell them at my interview what I understand has gone wrong and how I have a desire to prevent anyone else having to

go through such misery. I seem to already love clients I haven't as yet met, I notice my protective, nurturing nature.

The interview is familial and warm, I feel I could spend a lot of time in this cosy environment. When the Partner rings my boss to see how the interview has gone, we are still chatting like old friends. I join the firm, I really fit in, the people here *really* care about doing a good job. My new boss has seen something in me and goes to considerable effort to recruit me into a mature place where I am unusually young. I love my boss, he treats me like a trusted grown up with a contribution to make, he holds open the door to a room full of possibility and I grow into it, I am not controlled, I am free to be myself, show my true nature. I am flourishing. This feels like a family where all the members are free to express themselves but with the boundaries and resources to feel safe and provided for. There are none of the strict unchallengeable rules and structures of the bank and catering company, no pointless rituals. This is me at my best, able to grow like a healthy seedling in good soil and well watered, trusted and not treated with suspicion or policed/policy'ed into behaving myself. Neither over pruned nor allowed to run rampant I am held in positive regard and I am sent to a client on my own - I'm not massively confident, but I am enabled by the belief the organisation has shown in me.

I start work in Bristol - a system implementation using only the financial aspects of the system I know. The finance modules are being fed by a bespoke sales system, choosing a different sales system has been done for political reasons and is causing a total headache.

The project team on the finance side is me and George. George is an alcoholic, he makes no secret of it, he's practically introduced to me as George The Alcoholic. It's not unusual in systems implementations for the team to be made up of people that the

organisation doesn't know what to do with. My initial thought is I'm going to have to do this on my own and carry this Alcoholic along with me. I resign myself to make the best of it.

However, we are sat next to each other and we are just two people working together for hours every day. We start to get to know each other. The Alcoholic label slips away and it's George the interesting funny guy with a great sense of humour and a wicked twinkle in his eye who likes gardening and is treated like a naughty little boy by his wife and daughter, a role he seems more than happy to play into.

I'm fond of George, he tells me he is the child of an English mother and a German prisoner of war. He tells me about his childhood and how ostracised he was growing up in post war Britain, how as a school boy the ice cream man refused to serve him. I feel it's no wonder he has grown up into an alcoholic, what an utterly pointless exercise to attribute blame to a child for who his parents are, to make an individual the scapegoat for the systemic failings of war.

As we cease to relate to each other as Consultant and Alcoholic a much more human bond starts to form. It becomes me and George united in the battle of IT Implementation. We sit gazing at the screen together united against the common enemy of the incoming sales data. Hours spent together poring over the screen and the relationship between us builds.

One day in an otherwise silent office we are gazing in wonder at the latest batch of meaningless data to have ambled across from the sales system. Morale is low in the Sales team, the system is not living up to expectations, promise after promise of modification or repair is not materialising and the consultants from the other company are as demoralised as their client.

Meanwhile, for me and George things are going well. The physical interface between Sales and Finance systems sets a very clear boundary for where the Sales team's responsibilities end and ours take up. This artificial truncation does not encourage the kind of holistic approach that an ERP system demands. I have worked with other consultancy teams where using different companies has led to a constructive and friendly level of competition. This is not the case here, the power differential of a working vs. non-working system is too great. Gleeful in our bright shiny system, warm and comfy in our companionable space, ticking tasks off our to-do list with gay abandon, we become a little over confident.

George has been posting journals trying to get meaningful results. In our smugness we have been chatting and then suddenly our eyes lock simultaneously on the domain name we are playing in. Wordlessly we realise with perfect synchronicity that George has been frolicking in the live system, he has been posting random and fantastical data into the place that should be showing the most meaningful of information; the holy grail of the finance system containing the results of the entire company. Not only that, in our creativity we have taken it on a fantastical journey like Hansel and Gretel but without the breadcrumbs. We have taken all manner of twists and turns with no idea how to retrace our steps. "Oh my god" says George in total horror, his hands held aloft lest they once more touch the keyboard and create more mayhem, "What have I done?" We lock eyes, it's kind of a disaster, it's a basic system error not to put controls in place to ensure that the test and live environments do not get intermingled, but in this shared moment of understanding and mutuality we giggle and snort uncontrollably like school children.

The rest of the office is looking at us, the low hum of office life is not used to being punctuated by giggling, certainly no one has heard George laugh before. When we finally pull ourselves together we repair the damage, attributing neither blame nor

retribution, we co-operatively restore the status quo and continue on our way.

Recovering from setback together deepens our bond.

History is littered with commentary of collusion leading to disaster; Groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs when the desire for group consensus overrides people's common sense desire to present alternatives, critique a position, or express an unpopular opinion. Here, the desire for group cohesion effectively drives out good decision-making and problem solving.

Two well-known examples of Groupthink in action are the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster and the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Engineers of the space shuttle knew about some faulty parts months before takeoff, but they did not want negative press so they pushed ahead with the launch anyway. With the Bay of Pigs invasion, President Kennedy made a decision and the people around him supported it despite their own concerns. This is not what happened here, neither of us were failing to express an opinion, privileging our relationship in our human frailty we had a momentary lapse in concentration. Had we despised each other the same lapse may have occurred. The finance project was postponed for a while to allow the Sales project to catch up, by the time it reconvened I had already been assigned to other projects so a new Consultant was despatched. The new consultant and I speak often on the phone and the new consultant tells me how warmly I am remembered and spoken of. Seems the warmth engendered between George and I has rippled out across the office.

When I compare the happiness I felt at KPMG compared to the continual state of anxiety I inhabited at the Bank and the Catering company, I realise how much I can flourish given the right circumstances. When I am supported but not overly



controlled, free to bring my whole self, my entrepreneurial and creative spirit as well as my technical expertise, treated as an Adult I am able to give of my very best. When I lost the label applied to George The Alcoholic and came to know him as a human being with a story to tell he went in my eyes from a project encumbrance to a valued co-worker. I don't like to think that I was judging him because people often feedback to me that I am received as non-judgemental and that is a source of personal satisfaction, but clearly I was making a judgement about him when I heard the label Alcoholic and dehumanised him into a project risk. At least I suspended that judgement sufficiently to overcome my own prejudices.

Overall I came to really value the dialogue, humour and warmth that went into creating our relationship and how that relationship became a bedrock of productive work, particularly when it came to things going wrong. The first time I wrote this I wrote "we" rather than George had posted the data. I have a tendency to take responsibility, it's been a source of frustration sometimes as others are always happy to let that happen, I've done it to remove the blocking or distraction of attributing blame, I've done it because in the role of Expert Consultant I have felt everything to be my responsibility until the responsibility is gradually transferred from me to the client, but in this particular instance it serves to highlight to me that in close working relationships I do lose a sense of me and you and become very much a "we".

### ***The End***

I gleefully traverse Europe implementing system after system with success. Flying in the face of IT folklore my projects are coming in again and again on time and on budget. In the midst of a multinational project that we are running from Venice, our rather stiff Swiss client tells me in an unusually emotional moment that I am the

sunshine of the project. Of course I am, I'm loving every minute of it and I radiate the happiness to those around me. The energy I feel is infectious.

I fly out on a Monday morning with a birthday cake in the shape of a Koala bear strapped into the seat next to me. I have made it to celebrate the 30th birthday of my Australian client, it's clear to everyone that I do things differently. I make friendships that I know will last a lifetime.

I get off the plane in Croatia, the war not long ended, it's me and 40 members of the Peace Corps in business class. I feel like a pioneer, I'm pushing back frontiers and embracing different cultures. I am spreading warmth and conviviality, learning about myself juxtaposed by cultural differences of the people I work with, having my hand held by an unusually emotional Italian finance director, frisked for hand guns in the Zagreb finance department. I have never been so fully immersed as I am as everybody goes about their working day. My own boundaries are stretched, I've never realised how diverse we all are, how distinct our identities, how utterly pointless a "one size fits all" approach is. I drink too much and eat too much, this lifestyle is not sustainable for the long term, but never mind.

On the 4 August 2001 everything comes to an abrupt halt when I take Declan into hospital suffering acute Pancreatitis and after a roller-coaster of diagnoses, mis-diagnoses, hopes raised, hopes dashed, he dies 16 short weeks later on 17 October 2001, so utterly riddled with cancer that the experts couldn't tell where it had started.

I lost enormous faith in the medical or scientific model that sought to poison my husband in the vague hope that he would survive and the cancer wouldn't, the philosophy underpinning such an approach seemed utterly brutal and archaic. I resented the doctors for their powerlessness in this situation and the arrogance of their unquestioning belief in what they were doing. The certainty expressed that all

would be well only made the truth more shattering. Of course, I pulled that certainty from them, in the worst crisis of your life it's easy to only hear what you want to. There was some comfort to be gained from their self-assuredness. I ask myself what could they have said and there isn't really anything.

The feeling that they were alongside, doing everything they could, explaining their actions might have been more helpful. I distinctly remember teams of medical students gathered round beds enthralled at the intellectual interest our case presented but in the absence of empathy or recognition of our human-ness. One doctor noted that I was at my husband's bedside day and night and I was left gazing at him in wonder thinking where else he thought I could have been.

We were transferred from one hospital to another on the understanding that this would secure a cure, only to be told by the receiving hospital that there was no hope. The shock of this news and its departure from what we had been led to expect caused me to pass out on the floor of the Consultant's office, when I came round I was vaguely aware she was stepping over me as I was impeding her exit.

I was put in the hands of Macmillan Nurses and Counsellors but they just seemed to feed off me, meeting their own needs. I fantasised about them going back to their families at night with tales of our terrible unfolding tragedy and their part in this war story. There was a moment discussing a news story about carcinogens in Spanish Olive oil and I remember the nurse recoiling in horror but then really engaging in the story for fear cancer might actually impact *her*. I remember thinking so that's what she looks like when she is really affected by something, rather than the soothing platitudes she had come to pour over us I caught a glimpse of how different she looked when she was being authentic.

In the weeks leading up to his death, Declan cried for the suffering he was causing his mother, he continued to crack jokes and raise a laugh amongst the nursing staff, he teased me by pretending the morphine was making him think he was Scooby-Doo, I still can't watch that programme. I posted his massive number of get well messages all over the walls of his hospital room, I was screaming silently at the hospital to look at this man, look at him as a human being, look how many people's lives he has touched. Some instinct that if they could just see how loved he was, they might try that little bit harder. They offered to withdraw treatment, let his final few days pass by with less intervention but I was adamant we would fight to the bitter end. I felt that was in keeping with his character. He, in the meantime, cared for the well being of everyone but himself, he prevented his friends from visiting in case they were shocked by his appearance and he provided financially for me. It didn't seem natural to allow his death to end the example he set.

On the night he died there was a terrible electrical storm, the like of which was only matched by my internal tempest. A catalogue of extraordinary events happened around this time, my sister turned up at the unexpected moment of his death, compelled to drive the 160 miles and come to the hospital under some sense that she should be there, some other friends turned up unexpectedly after being asked to stay away, Declan's family weren't there which gave me some much appreciated privacy with my husband so I could whisper in his ear what he meant to me. Speak to him on my own in a world where everyone appeared to want a piece of him, without an audience for once.

My Dad believed he saw Declan's soul leave the room in the form of a purple electrical charge, pictures fell off walls, electrical devices stopped working. I may have rejected all this had Jung not reassuringly written "symbols...do not occur solely in dreams.....There are symbolic thoughts and feelings...common examples are those of a mirror that breaks, or a picture that falls, when a death occurs" (Jung,

1968, p.41). This congruence between my inner and outer worlds became a feature of life moving forwards.



**Figure 27 Me at the moment of loss**

After his death this unexpectedly large party of people left the hospital together, it was late, I took care to make sure everyone's parking was paid, saw them into their cars. Declan had died at 9.40pm and by the time we had rung everyone who needed to know it was getting late, people had come a long way, I took them home, fed them, made up beds and then went to bed myself. A co-inquirer commented on how odd that I be looking after people at this time but I can recall purposefully wanting people to be able to attend to their own shock at what had happened and not to cause them to worry about me. A new world opened up and an old one fell away, or maybe vice versa.

### *The Middle*

To try to reconnect myself to how I felt in this time, I try writing in a free form, automatic way, without thinking too much about the intention, just holding the emotion and letting the words pour out of me. This takes me back to the place:

“I am standing at the start of my own path, it’s dark from the shade of the forest and twisty, quite muddy and appears to be leading downwards, there are lots of those rocks that tip up if you stand on them awkwardly and there’s only room to go single file. I stand with my hands on my hips with my sleeves rolled up breathing in the moist cool air wondering why I would want to go down here.”

Figure 28 December 2010 DSG submission

My husband has just died. I notice how difficult it is for people to be around me, people cross the road to avoid me, afraid I think of the uncomfortable feelings they might provoke, like I might have forgotten and they are worried about reminding me. Barry, my neighbour knocks on the door, he takes me for a walk round the nearby meadow, there’s some comfort in walking, in a world where most of my body seems to have shut down it seems my legs still work. He turns to me, looks me in the eye and says “I just don’t know what to say to you”, and we kind of awkwardly laugh, as if there is some killer phrase that he could come up with that would put everything right. It seems there is not enough depth to language to truly resonate with this experience.

A bereavement counsellor asks me to describe how I am feeling, I say I feel like there is an utter gaping open wound along the entire right side of my body where Declan has been ripped away and I can’t imagine how it will ever heal. In this moment it feels so important to be understood.



I am utterly torn apart, processes seemed to have been set free in my body that I had no idea existed. Totally choicelessly my subconscious seems to have taken over, closing off some aspects of my consciousness, only letting me have them back when it decides I can deal with them. I am in awe of this sub conscious mind that suddenly is making all the decisions for me. I can't make sense of how someone could die so young and the medical profession could do nothing, that after three weeks of eating and sleeping at his bedside I was packed off home with two white plastic carrier bags containing his possessions and not him. When my cognitive mind didn't know which way was up, my sub conscious mind seemed to decide to provide me with my own medically induced coma.

I sit round the kitchen table with his two best friends in silence with very little in common except a shared sense of loss. My best friend moves in for 8 weeks relieving some of the feeling of being so achingly alone. I would lock eyes with strangers in the street who seemed to have an unspoken understanding. I had a sense of connection to my fellow man that I had no idea existed. For the first time I discovered how, once all the protective carapace of life had been stripped away, we seem very in connection with each other at a level that seems altogether more profound than the flotsam and jetsam of words.

My GP tells me I should go for walks and really think about getting back to work, he offers me Diazepam, Prozac, Cipromil, Amitryptiline, Temazepam. I gaze at him in numbed horror, despising him for his impotence, appalled that he thinks these chemicals can in any way make up for what I have lost, sickened by his profound lack of understanding.

During a home visit the GP cries at my predicament and I find myself in this basic human to human moment when he displays his vulnerability, trying to comfort him.

## *The Beginning*

In common with others who experience dramatic uninvited change; redundancy, bereavement, divorce, in the midst of all the dreadfulness one has the chance to re-evaluate one's life. It seems a permission is granted by being unceremoniously flung off life's conveyor belt. Cataclysmic events present us with a choice; to allow ourselves to become a victim of a situation we cannot control, or to summon up the courage to confront the non-negotiable and to find a way to ensure it gives purpose to our own lives. Judy Tatelbaum wrote about the opportunity afforded by Grief, "Having the courage to face sorrow, disappointment, and hardship invariably generates a much more rewarding life. Having the courage to confront death with honesty inevitably means that we examine our lives, our values, our ideas, and our sense of meaning, so that eventually we can create an existence that has satisfaction and purpose....we can live our lives with more zest and depth...the courage to accept death will enhance our lives." (Tatelbaum, 1983, p. 18).

I have children with my new partner in 2004 and 2006, my Maternity leave expires and I am advised I can return to my thriving career, an option that seemed ludicrous with two small babies, or I can leave. I was highly paid and I could have afforded magnificent childcare, I am aware that some mothers do reconvene with careers seemingly irreconcilable with family life and I do not seek to criticise them, but the experience of being widowed had given me the time and financial means to allow me to question how I wanted to live my life, what was important, how I wanted to be as a mother.

By 2008 I was getting anxious that the gap in my career was growing wider, so I looked for a child friendly route back to work that I felt I could offer as a legitimate and productive way to show how I had spent my time other than child-rearing. It

says something of the hegemony I was working under that I so underplay the quite incredible importance of being a mother, but also for myself I needed the intellectual challenge and the satisfaction that a working life can bring.

In order to continue being the sort of mother I wanted to be whilst also meeting my own need for fulfilling work, I found a part time Masters degree aimed specifically at Consultants. I enjoyed the variety of a Consulting life, I have never felt too interested in working in a regular office environment, feeling very switched off by routine, and I rationalised that with more qualifications I could choose from a wider pool of opportunities with a better work/life balance.

When I started the Masters, a monumental step for me on the journey back to employment after the break to raise my children, a challenging time for most mothers, a time when my confidence is at a low ebb,



**Figure 29.** The intimate experience of becoming mother. Set, appropriately, in stone

I found my learnt pattern of conversation that contained much hyperbole and exaggeration in my desire to entertain, was so ripped and shredded and pulled apart in terms of my intention and meaning that I could barely get to the end of a sentence. Often finding myself speechless and unable to respond in the language of the setting – which appeared to be by reference to established Psychological models or by quoting from learned texts, I experienced this criticism wholly negatively and felt very excluded. To wish to turn negative experiences and setbacks, into positive learning outcomes is a part of my nature, it plays out in my Consulting interventions, encouraging Clients to extract the learning from difficult encounters, supporting their personal growth into a place where they feel able to confront rather than run away, to view the extraordinarily difficult as a potentially life enhancing experience and opportunity for immense growth, both personally and professionally.

I feel compelled to continue the project of helping and care-giving that my husband embodied. If I am to encourage others to confront difficulties, go into difficult and uncomfortable spaces and recover from setbacks, embrace change and confront difficulties with emotional readiness, suggesting they see them as opportunities for a potentially richer life, I need to confront my own difficulties, reflect on my own setbacks and the enormous changes I have been through to find out how that lived experience can be used in service of my clients. I need to understand how I might be able to recover from them and why some things have been so difficult to come to terms with. Not just recover but positively learn.

I noticed how constant and figural my husband's death was in everyday life, how tired I was to keep going over it in my mind and how I perceived I was constantly "bargin' on about it". At the time some idiot said I should journal the experience because it would be cathartic, I couldn't bear to, why would I want to write it all down? When would I want to read it? What would make me want to produce a piece of prose that would make me relive the whole dreadful experience? And yet even in that angry voice, in the vulnerability I showed, in the preparedness to talk about something desperately difficult, others around me started to talk openly about their losses, seek help for the first time in years for their distress at the death of their father, school friend, marriage breakdown, brother, son and I did think maybe it would be helpful to others, maybe it would be helpful to me.

All in all, what learning can I extract from recovering from the uninvited inescapable change of moving from wife to widow, and set back and things not going as I might have hoped? What have I learned from dealing with the things, that I would have so differently but cannot change, can I share for the benefit of others? What have I learned about being a mother and engaging in the world differently?

Jung believed that we are born inwardly whole, that we have a specific nature and calling that is uniquely our own, but that most of us have lost touch with important parts of ourselves. As a result we feel that our lives lack meaning, or that we are living inauthentic lives. We experience a vague discontent and disenchantment, a feeling that there must be more to life. This striving towards wholeness, towards finding our ‘true personality’, is what Jung called individuation. Individuation is the process of coming to know, giving expression to and harmonizing the various components of our psyche. Once we realise our uniqueness we can undertake the process of individuation and tap into our true authentic self.

Once we achieve this, Underhill writes; “...the disharmonies between the part and the whole are resolved” (Underhill, 2010, p. 21).

### ***My Response to my Story***

Why have I written these stories and what am I learning from them? I have previously gone through life absorbing experiences, moving onward and upward until the experience of bereavement forced me unchoicefully to stop and take stock. Keen to find meaning and purpose as I bumped and rallied into a new reality, I spent many years overwhelmed by Grief and alarmed that this did not seem a normal response. When I have experienced discomfort in the past; the Bank, the catering company, I have tended to escape but confronted by grief with no reasonable means of escape forced me to confront who I was, what I valued and what I wanted out of life.

I contemplated suicide, kept a bottle of Declan’s morphine in my bottom drawer just in case the pain became unbearable, but even as I tucked it away I knew I would never take it. What stopped me in the first instance was the extraordinary experience of connection to those around me; his friends, my family, total strangers. I couldn’t



impose the change on them that I felt had been imposed on me. I knew that a day would come when I would be in a position to happily throw the morphine away. The bottle became almost a religious relic, a symbol of what I was moving towards. I was aware I had cleared a special space for myself in which to navigate my way to that day. The bubble I now inhabited was so out of the ordinary way of being and relating. I had an intuitive knowing that I needed to feel my way through this experience and not muffle or insulate myself by applying anaesthetizing layers of drugs.

I wanted to look forward to a brighter future and I didn't want to pass this anxiety and hurt onto my children. I wanted them to have the childhood I had when the world was safe and full of adventure and wonder, not sad, depressed and living in the past. Actually I wanted this for myself too.

So when I took myself back to the start of my grieving process, I recalled two things from my bereavement counselling:

- 1) I was asked what had Declan given me that was so hard to live without and,
- 2) In response to my weeping over the post death bureaucracy I was asked if I had ever enjoyed doing admin.

What had Declan given me, what had I liked about him and the life we shared?

Declan was an extraordinarily socially aware individual, he worked hard but with his priorities set clearly on friendship, having fun and obtaining a good quality of life. He was musical and quite artistic, I shared these values but it seems to me that I suppressed them when I pursued the academic model at school. I privileged what other people valued over what I wanted. The stories that surfaced in my autobiography showed me to myself and reminded me of my instinctive, creative and

intuitive self, that person that wrote poetry and had a huge affinity with nature, a natural musicality and overwhelming empathy, I had had a faith in and a love of humanity. I saw myself as someone quite caring but who got no pleasure from being the centre of attention and I feel slightly fearful of how to incorporate my introverted tendencies into what seems fundamentally an extroverted profession.

I was hard working and flourished in work that was congruent with my values, I have a naivety that I have previously been rather critical of but as a byproduct of this work I start to value it as a quality I would prefer over jaded cynicism. I start to enjoy my naiveté as a characteristic that enables me to start each day afresh. It gives me reason to believe I can start afresh with my new life.

When I pursued the economic model and became an accountant, in behaving how I thought an Accountant ought to behave, I suppressed many of these values still further.

To make up for my perceived deficiencies, I married my quite literal “other half”. When he died so suddenly, a huge chunk of me was violently ripped away, leaving me hopelessly out of balance.

And no, I never had enjoyed doing administrative tasks, the experience of being bereaved just threw into sharp focus this as one of many character traits. Although the world around me was barely recognisable there was a core of me that remained the same. The huge change had made me so raw that it was easier to see facets of myself as I was thrown into sharper focus. In the midst of the process of moving from wife to widow I seemed to strip away the learnt and adopted behaviours to reveal a core me.

This core gives care, feels connected to the world and all around me, is vegetarian and doesn't mind being the centre of attention when she has something to say.

Dealing with personal change is a complex issue, my experience of bereavement and grief churned up the whole of my life not only in the moment but also forcing me to reflect on how I wanted my life to look as I gradually rebuilt it.

Alongside its complexity lay its unpredictability, some things were helpful in accepting this change, most things were not and the gritty feeling that something fundamentally needed to be addressed endured. Superficial fixes and trying to control and design desired outcomes did not work and over time I came to see this as analogous to how I addressed things in my working life. In my IT practice I had not employed gadgets or gizmos to overlay a system that was fundamentally flawed and I was not able to paper over the chasms opened by grief in the same way that I had papered over cracks caused by jobs that went head to head with my core values.

At certain times despite a permeability to prevailing cultures when the conditions are right I absolutely have my own truth, there exists within me an authentic self that knows its own voice, that was the voice that knew that for all the negative aspects of the ritual of the ceremony, the response to Declan's marriage proposal was "yes", that knows which country should go first in a European system rollout, that doesn't feel the need to hide in the background or fears being the centre of attention.

*Journal 2010*

*"Down here I can smell the damp fertile earth, the odd seedling is poking through, alarmingly lime green in its newness, with its leafy head bowed it looks so vulnerable. Further along there is lush green semi unfolded foliage. I need to follow the flow of the stream and find the beauty in my own path."*

At times in this inquiry I have engaged in automatic writing to find out what I am thinking without over thinking or succumbing to the opinions of others. When I do I invariably find myself using natural and organic metaphors. Nature is clearly still important to me.

**Figure 30 Journal Extract 2010**

When I think back to a happy childhood my head is always transported to the hills, fields and rivers surrounding our holiday home in Wales. This exercise in autobiography showed me that my values hadn't really changed, they had been suppressed but they still fundamentally made up who I was. The happiness of my marriage to Declan had mitigated the discomfort created by suppressing them but the misery created by his loss has driven me to want to find a more self-sufficient and thorough way to live them.

***My Core***

Aside from rediscovering that I am happiest when out in nature and therefore not suited to an office environment full of man-made materials, these are the values that I think the stories have helped me reconnect to:

- That there is more than one way to “know” something, knowing I should marry Declan, that I should process grief without drugs.
- It is core to my nature to give care to, in my desire to escape it was care for others that kept me going.
- I value social connection and interaction. I have a spiritual feeling of connection to nature and the world around me.

- I don't like being the centre of attention unless I am clearly able to articulate what I want to say, and indeed feel able to find a way to say it.
- I am rather naive, I think my handling of the problems with the catering company and the bank showed naivety in their honesty, but I judge that naivety less harshly and value it for the gift it gives me to see the world afresh.
- Sometimes language is not helpful, there is nothing to be said, sometimes wordless being alongside is a greater help.
- I work hard and sometimes neglect myself in the process.
- I need to work authentically - I cannot suppress my values and enjoy good mental health, I need to find an offering that is congruent with the values and beliefs that I hold if I am to obtain peace of mind.

I notice my drive to act with absolute authenticity, the dissonance it has caused working in environments where people don't care for each other, or behave in ways that cut across my values. When I give care to others, try to shoulder and protect them from difficulties, it has been at the expense of my own welfare. When I have compromised my own welfare I have not been able to perform well, I have an ongoing frustration that I haven't taken better care of myself. My Supervisor asked me if I considered myself a catalyst and I jumped on it because it wasn't right, a co-inquirer suggested Accelerator, a substance that speeds processes up but gets used up itself in the process.

## 4. My Practice – Or how it feels when it is working

I chose to reflect on how the values that I had surfaced as important to me by the autobiography were reflected in my professional practice and so what followed was a combination of research and development methods to help me explore this. A series of conversations, interviews, case studies and live consulting interventions followed, some planned and some unexpected.

I wanted to find a way to work when my values were challenged, to understand the dissonance such that I might go into those dark spaces rather than retreat from them as I had previously by changing jobs. I intuited that if I found the means by which to go into the dark and distasteful aspects of project life; the hidden truths, deceit, toxic environments that manifested in stress and organisational ill health, I would be enabled to go into the dark spaces of my grief such that I might assimilate it and be alongside it, avoid it manifesting in personal ill health, mental or physical. It was no longer possible to ignore dissonance, there were no palatable avenues by which to escape. This seemed somehow congruent with the extent of economic, technological and social chaos that was being felt by me personally and more broadly in the wider world.

I wanted to work with groups who would be receptive and therefore help me to move the boundaries of my thinking on and individuals for whom this way of working would present a challenge, in order to challenge what emerged for robustness and because “Nothing we can learn about an individual thing is of use unless we find generality in the particular” (Arnheim, 1997, p. 1).



My intention became one of synthesizing what grief could teach me about knotty problems in organisations and individuals and what knotty problems in organisations could teach me about grief.

In the first instance I want to see how my values are already showing up in my work so that I can draw them out in a more intentional way. Design a new consulting offering with increased awareness of when I feel at my best.

### *The Smaller Case Studies - Surfacing the Elements of the Model*

The Soundtrack to this section would be “Shine” by Take That. It’s anthemic, uplifting, how I feel when I am working at my best. Its lyrics capture our human drive not to get stuck, to be open to possibility, to “figure it out”. I am self-conscious about it being popular music but I go with what works rather than impress. These individual case studies are simple and harmonious.

### **Bill Critchley - Case Study 1**

This was an emergent, unexpected conversation, one of the key events that with the benefit of hindsight marked the formal start of the doctoral process.

Towards the end of the Masters I am helping to run a conference, a round up exercise to which various academics have been invited. Towards the close of the day sitting in a discussion group, Professor Critchley throws, in that terribly laissez-faire way that he has, that “Consultants may do more harm than good”.

Something stirs within me, I wouldn’t normally challenge an authority figure. I teach assertiveness, I’m my own best student, and it’s a repeating pattern for most of my students to find authority figures present the greatest challenge. To persist in making

my point is partly a desire to change this behaviour and must mean I feel there is something of fundamental importance for me. Bill has told me previously he experiences me as needling him, he wonders whether he is a father figure to me in my own projections, I am still reeling from feeling on the outside of this group in terms of the language they use, there have been plenty of deterrents, but over the time I've known him I feel a certain fondness towards him, an affection and admiration for moments when he has shown vulnerability. So whereas normally I would back away from an authority figure feeling hurt and misunderstood, I pass off those self-conscious concerns that would censor me and persist in responding.

I'm not hurt by the comment, not in a conscious way, but I feel something isn't right, something feels out of balance here and I want to restore order. I try to make the point verbally about how would we ever know as the effect of not having the consultant isn't possible to measure. Bill suggests that as I work as a Consultant maybe I am hurt by what he has said, but I'm not, his comments don't upset me from that point of view, I am self-reassured in that respect and anyway I've heard it all before. Trying to express myself using a linear language frame I lose my way. In the opening scene of *Iris* about the writer Iris Murdoch, the young Iris is heard pointing to shortcomings of language.

“Yes, of course, there's something fishy about describing people's feelings. You try hard to be accurate, but as soon as you start to define such and such a feeling, language lets you down. It's really a machine for making falsehoods. When we really speak the truth, words are insufficient. Almost everything except things like "pass the gravy" is a lie of a sort” (Bayley, 2001).

I certainly don't feel able to say this feels wrong without a logical argument in place to back it up. Unsure of the point I am making, another member of the group who I

would place as the ideological inverse of myself, rolls her eyes at my clumsy mumblings and I give up, for the time being.

I want to change the behaviour of not holding my authority, so I follow up my conversation with Bill without this distracting other person. Working on the assumption that Bill as a Psychotherapist can make this encounter safe and an intuited sense that there is something of an opportunity in this moment, I plough on. Feeling brave and unencumbered by self-consciousness, possibly out of a belief that Bill won't be all that invested, an email exchange ensues that he doesn't permit me to print, but which he describes as profound. The key thing for me is that I notice I am making sense and finding authority, feeling able to make myself understood using mental imagery. The pictures arise seemingly from nowhere and I feel compelled to share them, frequently they wake me at 3am, my chest beating. I know I have something to say. I am curious about what gives rise to this phenomenon and go on a search for Causality that highlights to me my rather positivist stance that there is a Cause and a mental model that I tend to pathologise myself, assuming there must be something wrong with me. I can only find my experience reflected in Arnheim's writing which leads me to want to explore a rather unexplored territory. (Arnheim, 1969). Rather than grappling in the moment like I had at the conference, some processing has occurred outside of my conscious awareness. It becomes even more important to resolve my Grief if I am not in control of how I am processing what I feel like my thoughts, and to be aware that I don't necessarily have to respond in the moment. Previous consulting experiences have often consisted of being put on the spot and expected to return expert answers in some kind of rapid fire volley. I prefer this feeling of a more considered form of responding, not shooting from the hip in a desire to appear clever or to hear the sound of my own voice, but really getting inside an issue and connecting to my authentic response.

I'm rather mindful after this encounter that I have been rather focussed on my own drive to pursue my inquiry and I'm mindful that in future fieldwork I need to give greater consideration to the other; it has been meaningful and affirming if a little naive and gauche. The imagery seems very much to belong to Bill, not to me, I have no emotional response to it and so I am left very curious about the Transpersonal nature of the phenomenon, arising as it does from interaction with another person. What I am experiencing meets criteria described in literature as transpersonal knowing. Of particular relevance is a participatory turn in transpersonal knowing, one that requires co-operative engagement with another.

### **Bag for Life – Case Study 2**

The second piece of fieldwork is slightly more complex as it involves more people. It is an account of a DSG (Dissertation Supervision Group). It is still early days in the inquiry (Jan 2010) and again mental imagery is at the centre. The learning I take from this account is how the imagery helps to support mutual understanding, it illuminates different perspectives enabling the participants to be alongside each other with different viewpoints in a non-confrontational way, and in doing so makes for greater intimacy. I have some anxiety about how personal the inquiry is for me. Although I have some conviction that I will be able to make a wider contribution by the end, this close attention to myself and the 1<sup>st</sup> person nature of the inquiry is a little disquieting and rather against my upbringing. What was helpful in this case study was seeing other people engage in Imagery as a way to convey meaning, and using their own images rather than ones that I had contributed. As a newly formed group we are still getting to know each other, but in improving the quality of relating I start to get early ideas about a special space that can be inhabited and which feels qualitatively different from where 'normal' conversation takes place.

I start to notice other themes that come into the inquiry; differences between being paralysed or being in flow, altered states of consciousness created by emotional situations and the apparently two minds that I can inhabit simultaneously sometimes separately, that are separated by a somewhat blurred boundary. At this point I think of them as intellectual and emotional.

The DSG is on the 9 January and, given my father's deteriorating condition and the freshness of this news, I am a bit raw but I don't intend to bring this to the DSG; I see it as separate from the inquiry and inappropriate to ask this group to prop me up on issues not related to my inquiry.

My Supervisor has noticed a tension in me and is thinking it is to do with my emerging topic. She asks inquiry related questions that are checking out my ability to hold the unformed ideas, incomplete sections of my work. It helps me to organise my thoughts and helps me to distinguish between the aspects I am stuck on which are paralysing me, and the areas that I am still working through.

This seems an important distinction in my future work that I distinguish between things being "stuck" and therefore paralysed and things being "not there yet" but in process. I welcome her questions as a dialogic intervention and I don't feel defensive or anxious about the challenges being made.

From an intellectual perspective I am in a good place. Not so from an emotional perspective. This is the first time I notice how I can occupy these two different spaces in my head; emotional and intellectual and how they can appear to operate independently. In my previous working life I can recall how appearing logical and rational was privileged over explaining things in terms of emotion or feeling. This rather extreme example of containing emotion showed me how unrealistic it is to

think we can choicefully set aside our emotional lives when attending to our work, this places the inquiry squarely in the Action Research territory where truth is contextual and it is unrealistic to think we can leave ourselves out of the picture, this is not to imply that we should want to if what we subscribe to achieving is “Living Knowledge” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2).

In a flash I realise that I am not containing the tension caused by my father’s ill health. This hits me with quite a force and the tension release is to burst into tears. I am a bit overwhelmed by my reaction and try to explain through the clamp around my throat and the compression on both lungs what this reaction is about.

We decide to have a tea break and my DSG colleague, Anne, tells me she has a strong mental image of a “Bag for Life”.

Upset and trying to contain my emotions in order to get back into the seminar group, I am disoriented and wander about the corridor, unable to find the main room where I want to collect something from the previous day. I’m curious about being so disoriented given that I am in a building that I am very familiar with, my conscious mind notices what a state I must be in to be fumbling about in the processes that I would rely on occurring whilst on automatic pilot.

In that unreal slow motion time that happens when you have a car crash or critical event (something to do with the brain being in overdrive during a crisis) it seems like an age before I eventually go back into the room I have only just left.

I ask Anne if I can use this image because even in this state I have (slower than usual) assimilated that maybe some things don’t get resolved and we just carry them around, reusing them. If I extend this metaphor – even the Bag for Life eventually wears out, to be replaced by another. Given that I am conscious of my unresolved grief issues, I



am feeling a bit resigned to the fact that this image is telling me I may never get over them.

I share the writing up of the experience with the DSG members; Alex says she finds the intensity of the writing “...palpable and reading it took me viscerally back into the room yesterday.” She makes reference to the improved quality of connection between us saying “I feel very close to you both right now. Energetically close.”

I ask her what contribution was made by sharing the imagery; “The imagery is very strong, and I offer an alternative interpretation on the 'bag for life', that it is strong and flexible, and that over its lifetime it can contain and hold many different things; having a clear purpose and focused strength, yet capable of meeting many uses.”

Anne’s feedback is that the “bag for life image, to me, speaks to the reliability rather than the 'you're stuck with it' kind of angle attributed to life-longness. Kind of (as you say) it doesn't matter what you do to it and how many time it gets damaged it will always be available to you. There for you. Supporting you. Containing you and your stuff.”

And I feel like there we are, a newly formed group, creating a newly intimate and quite special space between us, gathered around an image, making different meaning with no implication of rightness nor wrongness.

At a later meeting when we are taking it in turns to discuss our inquiry progress and not unusually I am seeking help in determining my question, another member of the group suggests an image of trying to hold a beach ball under water. I really welcome the engagement in my search but my authentic response is that the beach ball might

be hers, she starts to cry, like a tension has been released and some level of flow restored. This group feels like it is working deeply together, I have the seedlings of reconnecting to my spiritual nature and being able to show deep care for others and working at a qualitatively different level of connection. I am mindful of a special space that we have created and am keen to hold it open. In some fledgling way I feel I am looking outward rather than nursing my internal discomfort, and by doing so I am making a small step on my own path to recovery.

### **Meeting with Steve H – Case Study 3**

I attend an Ashridge Masters in Organisation Consulting Conference in an Alumni capacity, my intention is to start to take my inquiry out of the safe environment of my DSG group but in a measured way, to a group that would be receptive. This group didn't know me but we had the common baseline of the Masters experience, so I made a calculated risk that this would be a sympathetic crowd, able to comment constructively but not so invested that they might only tell me what I want to hear. It feels like a brave but measured step to address this group and take my inquiry out of the cosy but safe environment of my dissertation group. A necessary risk to get constructive challenge about what feels like an unorthodox inquiry and how the outside world might respond.

The other members and I introduce our inquiries and the invitation is for participants to approach any of us to discuss things further. I recall being intentionally candid, not for effect but really speaking from the heart, authentically, not too polished, curious about what I might say in relation to the group I am with, noticing how much more effective I am having connected to my truth and respond to the people around me and what is happening in the room. This feels much more relational than delivering a prepared speech and I am just as curious to hear what comes out of my mouth as a result of the people around me.

In this particular setting I notice I am compelled to speak much more about the spiritual experience of mental imagery and I am approached by Steve. I had no control over who my inquiry would hold meaning for and I am actively experimenting with relinquishing control over outcomes and working in the moment with what is there rather than by reference to texts created in isolation.

Steve asks me in conversation if I have any mental imagery in relation to him and I say I have a picture of a cartoon lion about to roar. This image has a lot of meaning for him and we both feel we would like to talk more, so I invite him to come to my house for lunch; I notice my usual desire to be convivial and offer hospitality but I am also keen to understand more from him about why this image resonates so strongly.

A good few days before we meet up I start to feel apprehensive, I start to think I should cancel rather than put my fledgling inquiry through any sort of ordeal. This feeling of dread actually becomes a feature of this whole way of relating, it seems to be accompanied by some sense of connection forming meaning and I start to welcome it rather than take flight from it. The feeling is one of opening up and I become both wholly available and wholly receptive and in that, somewhat vulnerable.

I naturally have some nerves about inviting a total stranger into my home to discuss a topic that feels unconventional at this stage and I have no idea of where the conversation is going to go. This is an ‘undoing’ of a behaviour learnt in my early Consulting career when I believed outputs were controllable and a purposeful step away from the empirical paradigm into an action learning mindset, we were actively

encouraged never to enter a conversation without a clear idea of the outcomes desired.

We get into conversation quite easily and share some recent events in our respective lives, I answer the phone, he familiarizes himself with the environment, the tension I felt is easing as we sit and have a coffee together. We appear to be relating to each other according to normal social rules of etiquette, a learnt pattern rather than any kind of more authentic expression, display of vulnerability or pursuit of outcomes. I notice I have no imagery whatsoever as I listen to what he is saying and respond with thought out answers. This is the first time that I became aware that I need to access a different mental space from day to day functioning for imagery to emerge, this other state is much more about feeling in connection with another person, being in an open, receptive and attentive state, not trying too hard to make sense in the moment but responding from a more instinctive, natural and authentic space. As we get to know each other images start to roll, somewhat tempered by the difficulty I have relinquishing my self-consciousness. I start to place the establishment of a relationship as central to obtaining this higher quality of relating, and I also start to associate the strength and quality of imagery as an indicator of how well or developed the relationship is.

I allow images to rise up and predominate, I see the overhead power cables of tram lines – these seem to particularly be the ones that occur at ‘points’ where two or more lines converge so between the points and the connecting rods powering the trains, the images of the lines is quite tangled and difficult to fathom/separate. However, as the conversation rolls on, we quickly appear to ‘get on track’, the overhead power cables untangle and Steve quite quickly and deeply gets into the topic of our respective inquiries; in my head I feel quite amused that we have got to this space so quickly. I notice that the train we were motoring along on seems to have stopped and I am curious about that, I ‘look’ around the space in my head for some explanation of why

this might be, have we hit the buffers? Gone down a siding? I seek some explanation of why we seemed to have stopped but find nothing. A tomato image reassures me that we are still in fruitful territory – we have not stalled but something about the engine rolling backwards and forwards slightly informs me we are idling, out of gear, the engine is ticking over. As the imagery persists, albeit in a stalled state, I conclude that we have not disconnected.

Given that I have made lunch I get on with getting it ready, concerned that I might cause a break in the continuity, but Steve follows me into the kitchen and we are conversing easily. I notice I am not experiencing that neurotic urge to get my point in quickly, less desiring of wanting to impress or appear clever. A space has been created between us and we both seem keen to simultaneously inhabit it and hold it open. I feed back that Steve is making it very safe to be vulnerable in this moment. This brings home to me the importance of setting self-consciousness aside in these moments.

Steve is talking about safety issues amongst a team that he is working with and I get a picture of the circle of friends sculpture – I feel a great understanding of what he is talking about – notice I emphasise feel as I could of course have no idea and it could be part of Steve's offering to be very empowering/enabling/inclusive in his dialogue. To try to prove the correctness or otherwise of this image is not the issue for me, what I notice is how it enables me to maintain dialogue and flow, the greater the opportunity that is afforded by ongoing dialogue and the opportunity for shared understanding.

This feeling of safety and flow enables me to offer something about Appreciative Inquiry and the Danish culture even though I stumble and am not sure what point I am making. Steve seems to catch the conversational volley, it speaks to something

he is looking into. Rather than feeling foolish for mumbling some ill thought out ideas I feel I have made a contribution and met my own drives to give or offer something. I continue looking outward rather than nursing something inwardly that has in the past been the cause of withdrawal and disconnection.

This flipping between attending to the internal and the external brings a sense of how the imagery feels very immanent but then also appears to transcend, as the inquiry develops the image appears inside a space inside my head but as I go on seems to be appearing externally. It is as if what I mean by “me” is somehow more enlarged to fill the space in-between and incorporate something of “us”.

Steve makes reference to a fellow student that I have met who was a part of his Consulting Action Group (CAG). I got no particular substantive imagery with her when she spoke to me at the Alumni conference, except something of a milky white blur, I described it as spilt milk but it didn't land with her. In the time pressure of the conference I was unable to convey it adequately or explore it. The right time and the right space seems critical to consulting in this way.

It then happens almost a year later, I am working on an OD project for a public sector client. I sit next to a woman, I don't recognise her face but the milky images come back, less splattered this time. I turn to her and say “hello, we've met before, haven't we?” and she says “oh yes, the milk image”. I feel the fact that she recalls the image from a conversation that took place a year ago, and remembers me, is a validation of the phenomenon and I'm curious about what meaning is being imparted by its constancy. Despite the image holding no initial meaning for her, she remembers it and importantly for me it came back even though I didn't recognise her face this second time around.



When discussing this ‘offering’ Steve expresses a desire not to view it so clinically, that it detracts from the improvisational nature of it (my words – curious about that – he uses the word ‘wild’ – maybe I am trying to avoid overlap with a fellow student’s use of the term wild feminine in her inquiry), awakening me to the possibility that this has an emotional origin and how imprinted the positivist mind set is, how I am trying to measure and analyse in order to accept this experience as real and communicable. I get an image of a liquorice allsort – mentally pull the layers apart in my head and notice apart from the initial ghoulish pleasure this does not assist in the enjoyment of a liquorice allsort. I notice the image to Steve, he smilingly says he doesn’t like liquorice. I feel a drive to find out if there is a stripe that runs through him that he doesn’t like very much. I judge that drive to be inappropriate at the time because I feel like I have gone very deep and I’m not sure we contracted to agree to that.

Overall, this conversation has been unexpectedly easy, rich and very affirming of my subject area. Steve feeds back to me how differently he experiences me when I map out my thesis intellectually, as compared to emotionally, an experience that I find reflected in the previous case study.

Steve wrote up our experience separately and in his own words. He tells me he shared our apprehension both about what the day would bring and the vulnerability of putting this out of the ordinary experience into words, but he reminds me that at the conference when we first met I had an image for him of “a cartoon lion about to roar”. He had found this uncanny, it really resonated with him and his co-student at the time. He felt he was at a stage in his life when he was “finally honouring who I have always been. Roaring out my power and strength, to myself and the world.”



He told me he experienced me as “calm, warm and somewhat humble and unassuming - and yet – paradoxically inviting, engaging and deeply impactful”. This sounds like me at my absolute best. He described it as an “attracting energy force” and so I am very motivated to develop myself in this space.

I am pleased that he also describes me as non-judgmental and this too seems important to incorporate in whatever direction I am taking the inquiry, it helps me to place myself in the territory of Humanistic psychology and in so doing discover Maslow and Rogers and others who hold unconditional positive regard for their clients at the centre of their practice.

He referred to the time when I had no imagery as a time when he felt he was covering up, hiding some things. I find this helpful from an ethical standpoint that if someone chooses not to disclose information I will not kick over the carefully ploughed furrows of their persona with my hobnail boots.

He experiences me as “feeding him”, both literally as I serve lunch and figuratively in the conversation, which prompts me to want to look at the care giving that comes naturally to me and to look at Steiner’s writing about Nutrition and care-giving.

There were images that arose when we spoke that I relayed to him; a tribal metaphor, a circle of friends. He said these held meaning for him even before we had met. This leaves me with the impression the images are not just some random ruminations from which I try to extrapolate meaning but carry some element of mutuality. He also tells

me later, 3 months after our meeting, that he had an "oh shit moment" when a liquorice allsort image suddenly made sense and he started to see the artificial splits that he had created in himself.

Steve is going through change that he is not able to control but that he feels is an important aspect of bringing his whole self together and to his practice, I have some sense that I am supporting the space that is enabling this to happen.

Some months after this meeting in my home on 16 Nov 2011 Steve and I met up again. I notice the power of imagery to maintain dialogue and the irrelevance of time, this ongoing conversation has been taking place over a six month period with both of us re-connecting as and when it becomes relevant.

I have very few mental images except a chair and a table, we seem to have got into an office or classroom space. I have a sense of being "back to business" about it. Steve talks about how he has moved out of the emotional space into a space where he has had to write up in an almost chore-like way, I frame this as moving out of Heron's imaginal space into the conceptual propositional space, and that he misses the deeply emotional journey that being in the imaginal space provided.

I've bought him a book on the Huna tribe of Hawaii, it's a kind of offering, acknowledging our time together is coming to an end, but also a gesture of appreciation for the time we have spent and my desire that our relationship be ongoing. The third time we meet I experience much less imagery and I want to make sense of that. I wonder if this is signalling the end of our time together or given that this is early research, is the experience of imagery starting to leave me?

Trying to make sense of how I feel about this, I later journal:

*“Wide awake at 3.07 and these thoughts flood my head. In reality I have been a bit worried about the lack of mental imagery, have I lost the ability to have mental images? Has the connection between Steve and I been broken so that the quality of our relating no longer predisposes me to imagery? I’ve bought a book and I think initially it’s for me but I start to wonder given its tribal content, if it’s for Steve, so I offer it to him but I worry about being agentic and I’m not sure I have done the “right” thing, I seek clarity over that and I am reassured by Steve’s response, I recall that the spot that I felt compelled to take Steve to in order to have our conversation seems to be appropriate so I try to relax and allow images to rise in my head that might provide a clue to what happened, I feel generally positive about our conversation, I’m not dissatisfied that an opportunity has been missed to discuss some aspects of my inquiry with someone who, from their feedback, so clearly “gets it”, I feel I was vulnerable in discussing some of my private issues with this person with no contract that this is ok for us to do.”*

**Figure 31** Journaling the experience with Steve

I notice the 3am(ish) awakening again and then later Steve comes back to me about the images.

“I wanted to share that I had been giving more thought to "table, chairs and classroom" and it does resonate so much with me -

.....in my dissertation I had moved to a much more propositional statement of my learning and intentions

.....in my work I have been experimenting with using the practical and propositional to connect with clients who don't get hooked by my more experiential and presentational style...giving simple access to complexity, for them

.....in my home life, I have been getting my kids very organised and disciplined - particularly with my son and his study process, plan and fitness regime

.....in my swimming, I have been exploring the technical aspects of the sport as you know

So for me, the image is so spot on as to what is more present for me right now :-).  
...and how could you know all of that in advance !”

Steve is curious that I am concerned over the lack of imagery, his recollection of our time together is that it is “very contactful - very real - very present even”.

And so there I am at the end of my 3rd case study, a little over-awed at what has been awoken, a little disoriented that I should get to such a place of understanding with someone I didn’t really know, but with the repeating themes of holding this special space, the feeling of relationship, the imagery, 3am awakenings, my care giving tendencies, the “attracting energy force” that is me at my authentic best and engaging in dialogue that is no respecter of time lapse. I need to make sense of the dichotomous either/or pattern and the fearful sensations that accompany the feeling of being in connection.

### **Barbara – Case Study 4**

B comes to my home for a planned coaching session. She is a pre-existing client who I have worked for in my previous accounting and IT roles. I have implemented an IT system for her business to do her accounts and helped her with tax returns and some other quite mechanistic work around Purchasing strategy and logistics. I spoke to her about my inquiry in the early days when I was trying to surface the question and give

a name to the feeling that something was blossoming, although I didn't know what it was.

B and I have a good relationship so it is easy for me to let go of self-consciousness, reconnect to the rapport between us and have a very exploratory conversation. These are the prime conditions for me to practice and I find myself readily able to relax into the space between us. Not only am I able to relax but it seems it enables something for B too, and in this connected state she starts to express things that I haven't heard her speak about before.

I experience B as kind, warm and unreservedly generous who gains a lot of energy from caring for others and being in company, but I would suggest she doesn't invest anything like the same level of the consideration that she shows for others, in herself.

Her comments about herself a couple of times sound to me self-critical or self-deprecating. Sometimes I hear her belittling herself or under-valuing her own feelings. She has spells of feeling like she is not great company and tends to withdraw, she feels badly that we haven't seen each other for a while, but does not reach out for help and her bad feelings focus on whether she has let me down in some way, which of course she hasn't. I once took a parcel to a customer for her, to me a small gesture, which seemed to invoke a lot of gratitude, she makes reference to this gesture and how hard it was to let someone help her during an exceptionally busy work period. She seems very touched by the meal I have cooked for her but is immediately planning how to repay me.

We get chatting about a pattern that B observes in herself of getting angry internally with people and the feelings remaining unresolved within her. The anger is spoiling the quality of her life and she would like to find out what causes it and what she can do about the unhelpful feelings it creates.



I cook something for her, it's an aspect of my drive to give care but, given that we are already in a good relationship with each other, we appear to have entered this dialogic space quite readily. I don't feel the need to cook to aid our relationship building or to show my good intentions. I try to see what else I am noticing about the food that might be informing of the state of our relationship or what is going on for B in this moment. I notice that I have cooked something really nutritious for her, rich soup full of herbs and vegetables and beans, hot and comforting but seasoned with a lot of subtle underlying flavours. I serve it with bread made with seeds and feta cheese, green salad and avocado. Nutritionally speaking, nothing has been left out. It seems a very restorative meal. I am interested in this care giving side and what data there is in what I have chosen to cook. What I choose to cook in the moment seems as important as what I choose to say in the moment, both aspects of my care giving that have some informing quality about me in relation to my client, rather than me imposing upon the client a predetermined idea.

Mental images start to emerge quite readily. Whilst she is talking a hemispherical shape emerges with some strands hanging from it, I am not at all clear what it is, this is why I think the mental imagery is pre-lingual because I am not sure what is being established in my mind and do not feel that I am choosing a metaphor to relay an impression that I have consciously constructed. As she talks the hemisphere becomes the soft rounded dome of a jellyfish with the tentacles long and flowing, pulsating in the water but also with a lot of stuff caught in them, and they in turn are caught in the weed at the bottom of the sea they are floating in.

Sharing the image with B she visibly relaxes, aligning herself with the image of the soft unprotected dome of the fish, she recognises the entanglement of the tentacles and their stinging action and it helps her to articulate what is going on for her. She

talks about the state of current relationships, feeling trapped in the house and fearful of going out in case she bumps into a neighbour with whom she has a boundary dispute, she talks about other familial relationships in which she feels caught between warring factions or antagonised by one person who appears to be bullying a more vulnerable other, and she herself feels on the receiving end of people abusing power dynamics in relation to her.

I let her talk and try to support her; I experiment with seeing if I can manipulate the image in any way to see if it affects outcomes, but it seems I can't control outcomes. I try to jettison the fish free of the weed dragging it down, it seems to work a bit but then the fish gets dragged back. I interpret the entanglement and trailing tentacles as indicative of some knotty, multi-stranded element of the problem we are looking at, the stinging as representing the anger, interested that stinging tentacles are both a defence mechanism and a way to catch prey.

As the dialogue continued she spoke more roundly and the following themes emerged:

- 1) B thinks confrontation is bad
- 2) She fears getting it wrong
- 3) She fears being seen as a pushover
- 4) She is fearful of displays of anger
- 5) She thinks it is wrong to dislike people
- 6) She feels bad about thinking badly about other people
- 7) She feels bad about speaking critically of other people
- 8) She feels judged by others

- 
- 9) She feels taken advantage of, she is upset that the same generosity of spirit that she shows is not always returned
  - 10) She believes it is wrong to feel angry
  - 11) She is angered by people who prioritise their own needs over other peoples, especially in the cases of mothers and their children or anything that could be construed as bullying or the strong preying on the weak and vulnerable.

The jellyfish image in this instance brought our attention to how vulnerable B is at this time, the boundary argument with the neighbour appears to have been some kind of pivotal moment for her, she doesn't feel safe in her own home – with no exoskeleton she is exposed.

She talks about building a protective wall around herself but I can't help feeling that this is an inauthentic behaviour for her that would create further dissonance. My conscious mind might well have advocated periods of withdrawal and taking care of self, but this seems unrealistic for someone like B who thrives so much on being in connection with others, and I'm curious to find out she has been harbouring angry feelings. Instead we talk about what her heightened sensitivity gives her and whether she might make more effort to balance the experiences that drain her with restorative things. We also briefly touch on her tendency to take total responsibility for the interactions rather than seeing herself as a co-participant in which some of the responses belong to her but that some of the responses belong squarely with the other party and their take on the world.

The gradual emergence of the jellyfish image from a grey dome to a large animate object tangle in a bed of weeds, seemed congruent with how the story unfolded.

As B leaves, the tentacles seem looser and the water in which they are floating feels warmer; B says she feels very relaxed, as if some tension has been released. I mentally examine the bits of green sticking to my jellyfish, the image has enabled a cathartic conversation, a safe space in which B has revealed aspects of herself that I haven't witnessed before; I feel there is potential for further conversation.

I ask B for her honest response to the experience, telling her nothing is unsayable and everything is useful data, because I really want to understand whether it is helpful to others if I practice in this way, rather than serving my own desires for connection and purpose. B responds by email:

"I've just read this and it's ABSOLUTELY amazing! You are so intuitive and I am in complete awe that you could produce this write up."

This seems very affirming that the intervention has been helpful to her in that I have been able to show some understanding of her predicament, and that when we explored how it might be resolved we looked at taking restorative action rather than withdrawal, in this respect I feel the image has been very personal to B and not a generic symbol of anger that might have arisen with anyone discussing angry feelings. I reflect on how I might use the image as a spur to action for B, but it seems that it has been sufficiently impactful to enable her to begin to solve her own issues, become self-sufficient. B writes to me again the next day:

"I was absolutely delighted by your write up – so impressed. Reading it has really helped. Your imagery is very evocative – jelly fish etc. I'm going to read it again as it's helping me to make sense of things."

We have a subsequent phone conversation:

28/2/10 “I feel so much better. Seeing it all written down really helps. What’s come out of it ....I felt so good. I kept thinking I had to change and now I feel actually I’m all right as I am. When I read it I cried, I haven’t completely untangled it all...”

I feel very at ease with B following this conversation, the image has helped her but the food is quite dominant in this encounter. Its restorative nature is indicative of my ongoing desire to show care, but because I felt the need to provide something extremely nourishing it was informing about what was going on for B, inspiring solutions and also acting as an aid to dialogue.

I notice how exhausted I am after this conversation, as if I have experienced something of what is going on for B. I take some time to restore myself, this tells me how, when I am working at my best I am investing my whole self, and that can be really tiring.

### **Georgina’s Coaching Client – Case Study 5**

I have acted with increasing courage and confidence over the past 4 case studies, noticing the importance of relationship, sensing the space that is entered into and which is different to normal conversation when I truly enter into a place of connection with a client. I am really curious about the mental imagery that seems dominant in these encounters. I have never heard other people discuss experiencing such phenomena. I have read about gut feeling, intuition and knowing as something “other” upon which to base decision-making, but the literature seems scant. I want to know if this is an experience that other people are either familiar with or can become familiar with. I am curious and clear that it will guide the direction of my inquiry. If I imagine I am the only person who experiences consulting interventions this way I am going on a different journey to the one where everyone experiences it but

apparently doesn't want to talk about it, or where everyone experiences it but has yet to give voice to it.

The "Bag for Life" experience in the DSG has strengthened our relating so I want to go broader and deeper in a more intentional way. I was very much involved in that encounter and I want to step out of the way, remove my lenses from how an encounter is experienced.

I ask a trusted co-inquirer to purposefully pay attention to any imagery that arises in her coaching interventions; she has not worked in this way before, she has been alongside my inquiry and witnessed the theme of imagery emerging but apart from the request, I do not prepare her for the experience of imagery, this is her write up: "I met a new client this week for coaching, she was 54 and had pretty much done it all, 5 daughters, career, inherited a small fortune, left her partner as he wasn't moving forwards with her etc, etc.. She spoke at speed recounting her bereavements, her losses, her childhood, her relationship with her sister (bad) and her new found happiness, which she was not terribly comfortable with...she didn't really know what this happy feeling was. She had spun plates metaphorically for ever...and was, she said, driven. And so on...and on." This feels to me like the paralysed state that I try to overcome in my interventions, when we are idling or simply not making progress, the client believes she has the answers but seemingly not the questions.

My co-inquirer continues:

"Initially I wasn't clear why therefore she had come to coaching with me, she told me the story was familiar to her, she knew it all, she just didn't know what the answers were...but to what...what do you want? I asked...I know what I want ...oh I replied.

Then it struck me that as she spoke I was feeling this sense of a wave of "Stuff" washing over us, I told her she was exhausting me. I felt like we were in the

aftermath of a tsunami...bobbing in the flotsam and jetsam...all bubbly with hair brushed forwards by the force of the wave...just bobbing there in the water...I told her this.

As we continued the exhaustion passed, we moved to her life now and her hopes for the future....she told me “I want you to solve this...I want you to tell me how to relax...I want a solution”, “what before 1 o’clock” I asked...and we smiled. I felt connected to the story, I suggested attending to her grief, a few other perfunctory offerings...she agreed, she didn’t do emotion...after years of bullying she avoided it...it was the surface stuff of little use to her, when as a senior nurse her ability to get to the crux of the matter was paramount...stopped emotional life getting in the way.

She spoke of a patient/colleague who died this week aged 41

She spoke of her mother who had not had a fulfilled life

She spoke of her need to know herself

She spoke of her parents deaths

She spoke and I listened

Sometimes the solution is in the problem...look on at us sitting here...you want solutions...and by god I wish I could think of one....angst emerged momentarily, need to solve this, need to sound wise, skilled, offer her something.....then I stopped, completely.



I told her her story was exciting, I felt excited by the possibilities, I did. I felt extreme empathy, not projection or anything else fancy, just shared understanding. I told her that too, a little. She listed off her hopes, her plans, her goals... for growth and personal development.

I listened, I asked her if she was simply afraid she might never fit them all in?

I can only describe the next moment as being like a moment when we both gasped, we didn't, we had gone on this journey together for an hour or so...and there it was in the energetic space between us.....nothing else needed to be said."

I notice here a distinction between the post lingual metaphor of "spinning plates" with the qualitatively different experience of the pre-lingual "tsunami". There is reference to the space between them and after the image has been noticed and the accompanying embodied sensations experienced, the relationship seems to strengthen and the intervention becomes more flowing and warm. The interaction changes from one in which the client rather harshly seems to know all the answers to shifting into a more vulnerable space with greater disclosure on her part. For me as an external observer reading this account I feel enriched by the imagery, very connected to the experience as described and am left with a visceral sense of understanding about the coaching issue. I feel myself to be bobbing up and down in the water too.

It appears to me when I read this account that imagery is readily available to other people if their attention is brought to it. For me in this account, the imagery marks the pivotal moment when Coach and Coach-ee connected. It enriched the relationship between participants, and increased mutuality of understanding not only between the participants in the moment but for participants like me gaining empathic understanding both from the outside and after the event.

I notice the imbalance in the client privileging the intellectual over her emotional life and the special space created between Coach and Coach-ee when they form a connection. The image of the tsunami seems to mark the shift from paralysis to flow and the point where a now established relationship starts to do the work.

Given that this co-inquirer has been alongside me for the whole inquiry and has had a lot of time to reflect upon and connect to the experience I am placing at the centre of this inquiry, I start to consider how I might awaken it in others.

### **Richard – Case Study 6**

I plan a cycle of inquiry with Richard. We have known each other for about 3 years at the time of writing. He is a fellow doctoral student and we have been through the Masters prior to that in the same action learning set. He opted initially for a different DSG group, but he has experienced relational difficulties working with them and is considering moving to the same group as me. I am very motivated to help him, I have a tendency to want to rescue, a behaviour I attribute to a time when I felt unable to help myself, perhaps I could find meaning in helping others.

Working together now that we are in the same learning set, our mutual supervisor notices the warmth between us.

This felt like a real piece of work. Unhappy with interactions in a former group and straddling the turnstile between Module 2 and Module 3 of this doctoral programme, Richard and I meet to discuss how he might progress.

The transcribed text for this has not been included, there are issues of confidentiality around other participants in the interaction and the situation that Richard was recalling.

Richard wants to make sense of what occurred in his DSG group, why he perceived that some people had behaved ‘badly’ towards him, by which he meant hadn’t shown the same care, attention and dedication to action learning in the DSG as he felt he had. He had felt some comments were rhetorical, largely unhelpful, unwarranted and directed at him.

The imagery that came into my mind was of a fast flowing river with many twists and turns. This all seemed to make sense and gave me a sense of energy in the group, diversity and variety. I drew the image without trying to think too much in my conscious mind about what I was doing and noticed at one of the bends in the river I started to draw choking river weed stopping the flow. The flowers in the weed were two different colours and this seemed an important aspect of two plants against one river.

As our conversation progressed I noticed a rising frustration that I was trying to relay the images to Richard to see where we could make sense of it together, if it held any meaning, but what I was suggesting to Richard was simply not landing, in my mind I purposefully dived into the river image, the most salient aspect of the scene became a thick layer of river sediment. In some way I simply wasn’t getting through to him either in what I was asking of him or what sense I was making of what he was saying to me. The thick impervious, unyielding stickiness of the river bed seemed like a suffocating smothering layer of mud in which I was stuck, being left behind by a bouncing bucolic stream that seemed somehow along for the ride.

Richard responded to my imagery by going off on some journey of his own with it, bouncing around with ideas rather like the stream frothing up the river bank one way, turning and bouncing up the other side. He wasn’t particularly joining me in what I felt was a quite intense experience, namely the layer of river bed sediment that lay

between us. I wanted to hold him to making sense of this together but he was leaving me behind. Richard (as I saw it) ceased to connect to what I was asking or saying, the connection between us slipped away and I was left feeling a bit sad and stuck in the mud whilst the stream bounced along happily. We tried to revisit the issue but always the same feeling that I wasn't being heard and the growing frustration I felt that I was putting in huge effort but was just being ignored. This persisted for several weeks. I want to write about the quality of our relationship during this time and I could say either it deteriorated or I began to see it as it really was.

The imagery that I had surfaced in our conversation caused me to want to hold Richard to really examining what had occurred in his previous group, but I felt he wanted to frolic onto the next thing without stopping for a period of quiet contemplation.

“Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream,  
merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream...”

went round and round in my head; it seemed to me to embody the superficiality of our interaction that wanted to bob along on the surface, frustratingly refusing to go deep.

I limped through a few DSG sessions with him in which my rescuing tendencies were held up to me. My frustration that Richard wasn't hearing what I was saying was pressing all my buttons about being understood. The whole thing was compounded by what I fantasised as passivity on his part that was enacting another set of buttons on my recently failed relationship. I felt completely stuck; paralysed and frustrated that the DSG was, like the music in my head, looping and concerned that the whole thing was starting to become about me.

I revisited the transcript of our conversation to see if some other imagery might rise up and I could connect with Richard anew. With some discomfort my rescuing was staring me in the face. Throughout the conversation I finish some of Richard's sentences, offered words when he appeared to be struggling to find them, soothed and minimised some of the difficulties he had encountered, sided and colluded with him in the face of adversity. I felt I had disgraced myself. Rather than hold a non-judgemental space open into which possibility might be allowed to flow, I notice how much energy I had put into 'rescuing' and how I have allowed it to interfere with my own writing, my authentic response. I could hear myself becoming shriller and trying to direct. I am reminded of a co-inquirers suggestion that in taking care of others I had created the situation in which I was having to resubmit my thesis. I noticed how tired it made me to relentlessly try and make myself heard. When I look back I see this as a useful counter-transference dynamic and would, another time, have revisited the state of our relationship, how Richard represented a recently failed relationship and how that spiked my self-consciousness, before trying to do the work. It reminds me how clear I had been that I needed to understand the lenses through which I see the world before I can offer myself in the service of others.

When Richard is subsequently put into a position where he is forced to hear the messages that are being sent, despite me considering him a good friend, I make no attempt to contact him or lend him support, this is a remarkable change in my behaviour.

I notice a cautionary element to the care-giving that motivates me to want to be alongside people in their difficulties, how I allowed it to become rescuing in this instance. I also notice the lack of control that I am able to exert in my conscious mind over the images that arise; I felt like the images were holding a mirror up to me

and that in this way they tell the story of what was created in the space between Richard and I.

### **Thane – Case Study 7**

I am challenged at the Transfer viva about the extent to which I validate my imagery with my co-inquirer, and so far I have explored this with people close to me or my network, but I am curious what would happen with a total stranger so I try again with another cycle of inquiry to attend to the images and share them candidly with a co-inquirer.

Thane was referred to me by my then Supervisor, he was a student of hers at another institution and he was at the point of writing his masters dissertation. He was having difficulty putting his thesis into words, and given that I have been having similar difficulties she suggests we get together. I am interested in exploring the theme of mutuality that appeared in my work with Richard, and how practical it is to establish a relationship and connection with someone such that we can work together in this way.

In the first instance I invite him over for lunch. Before he comes I wonder what to cook. There's a spicy dish that feels right but a bit of a risk – not everyone likes hot food or there's a plainer simpler dish that I like but seems to be playing it too safe, both dishes involve eggs, symbolic of new life. It transpires this is not unlike the dilemma he is in, take the risk and sweat a bit or take the easy option, which would be nice but always leave a sense that there was something a bit richer out there that would be more of an adventure.

We get into the subject matter and I notice his individual life experiences of Buddhist

priest, Doctor of Physics, Teacher, Outdoor adventurer, yoga teacher, husband, father are treated fractural, not as one integrated bricolage that go to make him.

He knows the phenomena, but finds it's somewhat ineffable. I believe at one point I experience it also, it is a profound force that seems to have some of the qualities of a black hole in that it feels like being in extraordinarily heavy gravity and we are both silent for a while. I get a greater appreciation of what he is dealing with. I don't see it as a black hole in any negative sense, I find it awesome and visceral. I get a sense of balance between the strength of the phenomena and the strength of his self-censorship, but that this balance, like two repelling magnetic poles, is holding him paralysed.

The mental image I have is of his head set in a crystal ball and the crystal ball is set in solid glass, the ball seems to be his self censorship, the glass surrounding it, the phenomena. The weight and density seems very relevant here, imagine what this must feel like on his shoulders, but so too the transparency, unlike a black home in that respect. I notice I have mistyped hole as home and it reminds me of a few times he commented on feeling a lack of home and I am curious that but for this typo I wouldn't have mentioned this theme even though it recurred in conversation.

I notice my desire to encourage Thane to explore the phenomenon because I notice my own wellbeing improving as I find my way in the world and reconnect to an authentic sense of self.

I feel the phenomenon emerging as if it is defrosting, he concurs that he feels he is carrying a rucksack of ice cubes and taking one out at a time, watching it thaw as a pocket of energy. I suggest he could choose to speed up the thaw with some friction. I am reminded of my own experience when giving birth, when there is a moment of realisation that you are about to become a parent, that despite 9 months of knowing



on one level that your life is about to change forever, somehow you know in an entirely deeper experiential way that there is no going back.

I want to explore with him this sense of self-censorship that I get from him and the fractal nature of the individual ice cubes and the individual life experiences. He tells me he fears going into this new space because previous change has meant leaving something behind and he is a husband and father now. I suggest he finds a route into his experience that integrates aspects of his current self, to examine the need to shake everything off and start again. He is a Doctor of Physics so I challenge him to use his knowledge of quantum physics, black holes, space, space in between, gravitational pull, etc. as a metaphor to make the ineffable effable. In the time I spend with Thane I am exposed to the inadequacy of language for some human experiences. I discover how powerful the space between two people can be and the impact of moments of total connected tranquillity and silence.

Most of all though, I am responding to the challenge at the viva to validate my imagery with my co-inquirer. This is strictly against the heuristic methodology as checking against others experience can become reductionistic. However, I am interested to know if the mental imagery has been helpful in understanding Thane's situation so I ask him to respond to this writing;

“Interesting that you use the analogy of black hole - apt. Especially as it's created when a bodily mass implodes in on itself. That's my sense of things currently, that there is a strong force (gravity or magnetic) that is pulling the disparate aspects of consciousness together. The imagery of the crystal ball makes sense to me, although I notice that the sense I have of it now is more like a mental fog or spin when I try to explore it. Interesting also that you mention weight on my shoulders, for they both have been sore and stiff for several weeks now.

Since we spoke I have felt a few movements in terms of giving myself permission to explore this 'black hole' which I have created and am now journeying through. If I recall correctly, they are linked to wormholes that connect different spaces (levels of consciousness?). I have discussed it with my wife in more detail and in so doing lifted some concerns of what I feared... I think your suggestion of embracing (oh yes - that was a clear message I received. To embrace rather than push away what concerns arise) Quantum Physics and Yoga as an exploratory path to give form to the formless. It feels that the journey I am making is not one of going anywhere, but rather of allowing me to see what is all around me.”

Our next meeting was quite different. Thane records it, but there's not much to transcribe. For 5 hours we sit in relative silence noticing the shifts of energy between us and their accompanying range of different emotions, tears will roll down one or other of our faces, not in sadness, just in recognition of the lilt and shifts and gentleness of this moment. When we write to thank each other for the time given up neither of us really knows what we are thanking each other for. Personally I found it enormously affirming of the idea of transmission and perception, of something other than verbal communication or that which is described as body language when two people sit in dialogue with each other.

Thane's response to this is;

“I feel that we resonate in a way that co-creates a very different type of space in which we can explore different ways of knowing...there is a very strong current or flow of energy that I become aware of, that is connected to something.... And there is a felt shift from where I was before talking. It is as if the energy or flow is more real or my awareness of it is stronger. And it has more energy. Direction in it.

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I sense it is a journey that we can share - and see what we see!”

Keen to explore the encounter that for me has been so unusual and which seems to have shifted me into another gear with my inquiry, I journal after the experience in a free format, trying not to think too hard about what I want to say and seeing what comes out on the page. This is a journal extract from the time;

“When I come to write up this section of the paper I notice how I seem to have fewer words about my experiences with Thane and I feel a bit curious about that given that this was one of the more intense experiences. My rational brain intellectualises that there ought to be more to say. So when I contact Thane (23/5/2012, some 18 months since our initial experience together) it is with the intention of checking out with him the extent to which our experience is shared. I want to find out if it was as profound for him as it was for me without that screechy voice in my ear that labels me as needy or ego-centric. I haven’t heard this voice for a while but something about the way I put the conversation over to Thane seems to allow all my worst behaviours in.

Thane shares with me an image of spaghetti, which resonates with me, I seem to be trying to dish up so many strands to my inquiry in one manageable forkful, and observes that he can feel something pulling at his heart. I find myself looking to Thane to help me make sense, asking him to hold the space when in other fieldwork I have felt more like I am holding the space. He notices he feels anxious for a moment, and breathes deeply which seems to enable me to breathe. We are on the phone to each other and I try not to respond to an urge to fill the silence, causing Thane to check out that we haven’t been cut off. We both laugh at how long we would have been prepared to allow this profound silence to continue only to find out that we had been disconnected. The humour shared in this moment reassures me that we are not taking ourselves too seriously.

We have a few false starts at me trying to express what I want from him, in the end he offers to share how he experienced our first meeting. It's noteworthy how clearly he recalls the time.

Before he arrived he said he carried expectations, imagining that I was fully "sussed" and "sorted" in a world that he was just starting to explore, a reality that he only had some awareness of, let alone the temerity to believe it might be valid or real.

In the experience we shared he started to feel his suspicions, sniffs of something or daydreams he was having were far more real. He said I gave him a space in which he came to know this experience as a reality, to know what he was investigating and looking to hold. Intellectualising it was confusing the issue but in our shared moment it became crystal clear and I am curious he would use those words given the imagery that I had at that time. He described it as the most powerful re-awakening of his spiritual consciousness and felt he could live that in what he described as an "alert" or "mature" way. He said it was like finding his centre of gravity to which everything gets pulled, that he was no longer struggling against it and was able to work with it. I comment on how profound I find his remarks. He says his sense at the time was that it was so strong, clear and tender, startlingly clear and also elusive. He feels some sense of purpose about the journey that had led him to this point of our time together, after working at BP, meeting our mutual doctoral supervisor he feels like he has been on a path leading to the space that we created. He now sees 2 different levels of consciousness and is co-existing in both of them, which is both cathartic for him and acts as a beacon for others. His overall sense is one of indebtedness, not to me but to that space that helped connect him to his calling, giving him a greater sense of wholeness, fulfilment and understanding of his Buddhist vows.

I talk to him about how am I going to be able to commit an experience like this to paper and he laughs and refers to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in Quantum Physics in which a particle's direction and position cannot both be known at the same time, analogous to how I cannot simultaneously live the experience and write about the experience. I've been close to sharing some aspects when I write in my authentic voice, the feedback from peers is that it is "breathless", "brave" and "onto something" but I am troubled that this gets the feedback that it lacks academic rigour and reflect on how I can integrate a lived experience into an academic format without losing something of the quality of feeling.

The outcome for Thane following our conversations is that he goes on to write his dissertation about his own personal sense of having found his gravitational centre and uses that as a bedrock of his interventions.

I have been very open and honest with Thane about the imagery that has occurred in our interventions and tested them in various ways. It has been easy with Thane, his educational background and life experience, the experience of the time we spent together has left him open to possibility and able to respond in an honest and self aware way. It is not so straightforward at this stage in the inquiry to be so explicit about how I am practicing as I find the whole experience rather strange and unworldly. I focus my attention on validating the imagery such that I might be more confident to share it and therefore validate it in a variety of settings.

### **Gwen - Case Study 8**

I continue to work with determining how meaningful the images were for the "other", whether it is truly a shared and mutual experience with co-inquirers or whether it could simply be framed as my projections, solutions, interpretations and drive to

control the conversation. I have been very conscious of this issue as my practice has developed, checking and challenging myself by being explicit about the imagery with Steve and asking others to try working in this way, and in gaining feedback from B as well as reflective journaling. I am harbouring, however, an unexpressed fear that my inquiry will fall apart if this turns out to be true.

I go back to the place where it feels safe to be candid and honest about this fear, but in a way that isn't so safe I will be met with collusion and palliation; the conference held at the end of every Masters cohort on the AMOC programme at Ashridge.

I meet Gwen, who is planning to start the Doctorate at the next intake and wants to have a conversation with me. We have met previously and in outlining my doctoral subject she feels there is a correlation with her experience and intended inquiry area. We sit down to chat, Gwen starts to outline things, the mental image I have is of some kind of vine-like plant with new growth on it, I can see secateurs in the image and I'm reminded of pruning so I ask her if she has any sense of needing to strip back and get to the core of her nature. As we talk on it becomes clear to me that the vine is a grape vine, something of it being in the 'vieille vignes' tradition leads me to ask Gwen if she has had to cope with a lot of life experience, the 'old' is not a literal reference to Gwen, in my mental image it implied experience, which prompted my question.

"Old vine (French: vieilles vignes, German: alte Reben) is a term commonly used on wine labels to indicate that a wine is the product of grape vines that are notably old. The practice of displaying it stems from the general belief that older vines, when properly handled, will give a better wine." (Wikipedia 2012).

Gwen becomes emotional at this point, she weeps gently and explains that this is not uncommon for her. Despite being a compassionate person I notice no drive to rescue or comfort her. It seems ok to be alongside, she tells me, "Your instinct here was

right that I didn't need rescuing or comforting". The salience of the main stem of the vine leads me to think that there is more data in this image than I have paid attention to, and I ask Gwen questions around how she uses this life experience or brings it into her current work. This is because the more we talk, the image seems to be closing in on the bark. I think consciously about the role played by bark, as protection and a barrier to invasion, and I feel there is some insulation going on, as if Gwen is bundling up her life experience and setting it aside, insulating it from her practice. I suggest to her it seems worth exploring whether there might be some gain from choicefully bringing her life experience into her work rather than set it as something separate and outside and Gwen remarks that she has been giving that a lot of thought lately.

In the interests of ethical behaviour I ask Gwen if it's ok to say anything to her with the only intention being to further our inquiries, with a promise that we will try to resolve any difficulties this might cause for us. She says she is happy to go ahead so I mention the insulating nature of the bark. She tells me that as I said the word insulating she had an image of electrical wiring insulated as they are in plastic, we talk about stripping back that insulation and I say of course if they did touch they would spark and short out, this finds resonance with Gwen's experience of spikes of heightened emotion that result in emotional reactions such as the crying we have just experienced. We discuss how they might be laid alongside each other, running parallel but not actually touching.

As the conversation continues I notice a couple of times I get no imagery at all and I wonder whether this is the conversation drawing to a close, but then the grapevine image would persist and as we carried on talking I saw rescue flares, which seem quite forceful and appeared to be signalling both anger and distress.



I feel a great empathy in this conversation, the vine image held meaning for both Gwen and I. If I used the vine as a metaphor in my life experience I was cut right back in order to put on new healthy growth, Gwen connected to the imagery but was more interested in how the branches interwove. My life experience is inextricably linked with my practice, the strands in my picture look like a plate of spaghetti, but in finding my authentic voice this feels the 'right' thing for me. It's different for Gwen, she relates to the idea of strands although my picture is much more messy, we have shared understanding but she gets into neater ideas around electrical wiring and shudders at the suggestion that it might look like a plate of spaghetti.

When I ask her about the desire to get back to her core she responds:

"This image really resonates with me - getting back to the core of me is a vivid theme at the moment and has shown up in the last two pieces of writing I've done."

I notice my relief at keeping a rescuing tendency in check when she cries and this reassures me that I am operating in a healthy way, not seeking to control.

When the imagery prompts me to ask Gwen about honouring the crossover between her life experience and her practice, she writes;

"Again, this resonates with where my recent thinking and writing has focused on recognising that I'm separating and not honouring and integrating the different aspects of my experience. The image depicts what I have been doing in keeping these things separate, and has helped with my awareness of integrating this into my work. I'm not certain what that will look like yet."

Gwen affirms that at times in the conversation we seemed less connected and she didn't like the messiness of some of the imagery. Her own imagery is much neater

and contained and we are each struck by the fact that although they are different they have common interpretations around the idea of insulation.

We leave the conversation, the imagery has been a device to facilitate dialogue. I feel reassured that imagery is fulfilling a role in aiding empathic understanding. Had this been a coaching intervention I would have been curious about Gwen's reaction to messiness and the drive to identify her own images. In this way, images help me to look at situations in new and novel ways, giving me avenues to explore.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Singing Lesson - Case Study 9**

I am surfacing themes around what is salient to my practice, being in a relationship with the client, showing care, using imagery and holding open a space into which we might both enter and work together. I am responding to feedback, I am challenging and checking my integrity as a practitioner, the ethics around working this way, balancing my needs for personal growth and to feel understood with the needs of the client, checking my own internal demons and voices. I am conscious that I am still on my own journey of recovery from grief, however much I refine the inquiry I don't feel able to launch my findings until I have become more safe and stable on my own ground. There is something of a parallel process going on, as much as I need to develop the practice I need to develop the practitioner, and as I develop through self-knowledge I heal myself in the process.

As part of my inquiry I take up singing lessons, it's part of the whole experiential piece. A co-inquirer has commented that a woman's journey is to travel from her heart chakra to her throat; I know I am softly spoken, I know it's getting in the way to be so softly spoken and paradoxically I can sometimes be very loud and a little uncontained.

I know that I relied on my husband to speak up for me at times when I felt either paralysed or unable to stand up for myself, I didn't need to work too hard to make myself understood with him there to explain me.

Part of the enduring sense of loss is the loss of his advocacy or agency so I rationalise that if I can find my own voice, I will heal this aspect of my grief.

I recall how important music and singing was in my early life and I decide that if I start literally and figuratively to re-find my singing voice, other aspects of my voice will fall in behind.

When I start the classes, the disciplines of breathing and standing confidently seem useful skills for someone needing to present their unusual inquiry topic in an assertive and confident manner. An assertive voice is one that is purposeful, even toned and suitably paced and so I am happy to develop good breathing techniques. After a couple of weeks into the classes, however, I notice that I start to get a little resentful of the preparatory work.

I start to not look forward to my planned singing lesson. The up-front warm up exercises are playing on my mind and detracting from the overall enjoyment. I am keen to get singing because when I hear myself singing I get insight into how I am and how the journey to finding my voice is going. My response to doing the scales and warming up exercises reinforces my dislike of rules based knowing but I don't need to go over them repeatedly to know that I want to get past the tuning up and into flow. I am not striving to become a controlled singer, I am searching for my truth.

A, the teacher, starts me off on the routine of warm up exercises but the conversation quickly changes into an experience she has had at the weekend at which she had lunch with a group of her husband's friends and found to her irritation that she didn't obtain the level of connection she was seeking.

Initially I feel my own buttons being pressed as I feel a loss of control about the direction of what is supposed to be my singing lesson. I start to feel a bit angry and battle with the internal feeling that I am being taken advantage of because I have paid for this singing lesson and the teacher is prioritising her needs over mine.

I have no-one to stand up for me so I have to work out how I am going to deal with this in this moment. To express my voice I need to give legitimacy to my own feelings and draw attention to the fact that I believe she is prioritising her own. I can recall hearing someone talk about women's self defence and advising that a way to fight off an attacker who has you pinned to the floor is to bring a heel up as high as possible behind your buttock and literally use leverage to push a disproportionately strong or heavy body out off you. This seems an inappropriate image to have in relation to my extraordinarily beautiful dainty singing teacher but this is what happens in my mind as I try to manage my internal angry feelings and try every which way to steer the conversation back to singing.

Eventually I internally accept this is not working so I decide to stop fighting and relax, yield and take stock as I lie there metaphorically pinned to the ground. Seeing as we are here, I decide not to fight, rather than battle the situation into the shape I would like it to be. I choicefully let go of anger and enter the open and non-judgemental place in which imagery arises, so find out what more can be learnt here. I try to enter this dialogic space by empathic means, paying attention to what she is saying rather than the angry voice in my own head.

The fact that she describes this as a group encounter suggests to me that something has pressed a button in her, it's not about another individual but her relating in a group. She is her husband's 2<sup>nd</sup> wife and the friends they were meeting were predominantly his, known to him and his first wife. I notice a feeling of dread rising in my stomach. The feeling makes me want to run away but I stay with it as I increasingly recognise it as the moment of connection.

The teacher is younger than her husband, at 47 she is a not inconsequential, 18 years younger than most people in this crowd. She is also the youngest of five in her family. She is the only sibling to have pursued creative endeavours as a career and has spoken before about the frustration of feeling that her life choices have not been taken seriously by her family. I get a mental image of one of those fluffy string based floor mops, predominantly in the upper right of my mind. I ask her about validation and wanting to be seen as her husband's new life partner prompted because the "fluffy" and "floor mop" aspects are most salient in this image. She says that is exactly it, she wants to be taken seriously and she curiously reacts against that as something she 'ought' not say. We don't explore that much except when I suggest she embraces this 'shadow'; she seems to find that an unrealistic suggestion. I get an image of a bunch of bananas as she refers to her child-like (her words) fondness for good and nice behaviours and pretty things. She expresses concern that she is attached to inconsequential matters.

I talk about my feelings on authentic behaviours and she talks about her performance history as a professional singer; she starts to wonder aloud if she has so taken on being a performer that she has lost contact with her own self and that rather than being something she puts on in a performance, her 'persona' has been put on to all situations where she needs to socially interact. I suggest that if she is going into social situations as if they are a performance people will sense the inauthenticity of

her behaviour and may even withdraw from her. I suggest this encourages her to ‘up’ her performance, causing further withdrawal and for both sides a sense of confusion. The bananas start to form part of a fruit bowl, these suggestions seem to really hold meaning for her, quite literally bearing fruit, she asks me to go over these points again and ends up not charging me for the lesson.

It’s not the first time events have been taken out of my control and I have felt myself in an “unfair” situation. This example highlights to me that practicing in this way is mutually beneficial. It helped me with finding my authentic voice, a voice that can feel cross but is not able to act aggressively, has been passive in the past and internalised hurt and expected others to speak on my behalf but is now finding its way out. It has helped her to process some difficulties in a way that was safe and non-judgemental, having spent much of her life feeling judged.

### **My sister and her Partner – Case Study 10**

At this point in the inquiry I have started to notice what is important to me; knowing that is a combination of being both logic based and feeling based, identifying dichotomies and striving for balance between them, maintaining flow and relieving paralysis, establishing relationships and entering a dialogic space, sensing when I am in connection with someone and striving for authentic behaviour and using mental imagery as both a thermostat of what is going on in the moment as well as inspiration for what might drive solutions. Having given voice to what I value and when I feel I am at my best, I start to purposefully incorporate it in my practice.

The first opportunity I have to do that is unplanned, it emerges from something that happens when my sister and her partner come up for my birthday. Her partner has made me a cake, brought flowers, flapjacks, homemade marmalade, champagne, presents, most importantly of all of course she has come, whereas my sister often

comes on her own. Very touched by these gestures, I feel in connection with her to a much greater extent.

In conversation it transpires that completely out of character Jude is having strong feelings of existential angst, her previously philosophical stance has been replaced by some sense of pointlessness, given that it all comes to an end anyway, she wonders why bother? I've never heard her talk like this, she sounds almost depressed, I'm not equipped to give a diagnosis of that but my overall sense is that she is stuck.

Her work as a mental health nurse is in a scientific paradigm and we talk about some of the things that her job requires her to do, things that she doesn't feel are clinically effective such as making assessments and judgements based on questionnaires and models. I feel myself galvanised into action, I sense a kindred spirit who has become frustrated by one-sided knowing and by an emphasis on logical tools and the absence of feeling to establish understanding. I listen intently, let go of my conscious thoughts and allow a space in my head into which mental imagery can emerge. My mind fills up with nodes like the little soldering points in a piece of electronic circuitry. Silver buttons pop up all over my mind like a rash in a cartoon, floating around as if suspended in some carrier in a Petri dish, going round in circles. I notice that although there are many nodes, and therefore many potential new connections to be made, each node is connected to no more than one other node. This image arises at the same time as I have thoughts about the disjunction between Jude working with logical tools when I know her as someone with an artistic, creative, rather expressive side.

I wonder at the lack of connection – the complex network that this number of nodes could afford whereas it is only producing pairings. I comment that she appears stuck, she acknowledges that she is, I wonder about her creating a better sense of balance by



engaging in more creative activities rather than skewing her whole life towards the logical paradigm privileged by her job.

I was alarmed to hear Jude talk the way she did, in the nearly 20 years I have known her I have never previously heard her express feelings of futility and pessimism before. Rather than rush to judge that or rescue her from a place that created a sense of alarm in me, I am able to wait a moment and reflect through the use of mental imagery on how I might understand this interaction. The imagery allowed me to shed the drive to make everything ok, filter this information through the lens of someone in distress and to be curious and to ask questions. In the past I haven't found that Jude has readily accepted offers of help from me, but in this moment I felt really listened to. It seems I have no problem being heard when I am speaking with my authentic voice.

Within a few months, Jude has resigned her post and has taken up an apprenticeship restoring antique furniture. She talks about her new job, goes to some lengths to describe the intricacies of matching the grain in a piece she is repairing, her reawakened passion is clear. I go to visit my sister and we are out in the car together, Jude is sat in the back seat singing; I've never heard her sing before, my sister cannot recall ever seeing her so happy.

### **Giving Difficult and Impactful feedback - Case Study 11**

During an action learning set (CAG) I was asked to give feedback to someone who seemed in a tender space, they had never previously asked for feedback and attempts to engage in dialogue had previously been repelled. We had been in an action learning set for 12 months, we didn't choose to work together, it just kind of happened and the situation has been unsatisfactory for me as I constantly find myself feeling defensive and attacked for the beliefs I hold. I write in an essay about how I

need to leave this CAG to go to a safer, more supportive place, although harbour an inner nagging sensation that there is enormous learning in staying with this tension. It seems I am not the only one experiencing discomfort, the other members of the CAG are equally frustrated at the level of engagement, but so too is the protagonist. She has spoken in confidence to another participant about her frustration at the relationships in the group; feeling herself to be rather warm and loving, she wonders why she is not achieving the level of connection that she desires.

The confidante suggests she ask each of us in the group how we perceive her, and she does. My gut reaction is one of complete panic, I am desperate to be authentic, I sense there is a chance to create sufficient disturbance to relieve this stuck-ness. Given that previous attempts of feedback have been repelled I really want to say something sufficiently impactful to help. I am fearful that if I am too harsh the dialogue with this individual might come to a complete halt, too gentle and it will be dismissed as valueless, in either case an opportunity will be lost.

An image comes to my mind, this CAG member is sitting in an egg, when I talk to them it is like trying to reach through a thick tough membrane that they have surrounded themselves with. This moment in which they have invited feedback seems to be the first of a gentle corrosion through the shell. Most noticeable for me, the shell is tough and shiny and bright red, it looks like acrylic, for some reason I know there is data in this acrylic; I go round and round in my head, what's the data? What's the data? Aha, it's man-made. I relay this whole story as my feedback, I break off occasionally to ask my CAG to bear with me, not to judge me, not to think I am mad, but they have no difficulty in staying with me. This image speaks to them very strongly, unable to tell me why, I don't need to know, I am quite clear that something quite profound has happened for all of us. Like a dam that has just been blown up this unleashes a torrent of personal power that I can barely contain. As I

type this there is a lump in my throat, not an emotion or a weep but like a rising animalistic roar. I seem to have really found my voice.

My co-inquirer wrote this about the experience

“I get a tingling, feeling sensation when we talk about the image.

Heart beat bio-rhythm

We trust each other. Two firsts with me genuinely asking for feedback in the moment and hearing the egg image from the CAG (seminar group) and Ro sharing her image with me for the first time.

A bond. And a connection. I remember that CAG of course but it is the egg image that stays with me.”

### **Reflective inquiry - What am I noticing at this stage?**

I have an emerging model of my way of working. I privilege relationships and being in connection, I work to create a space in which participants can truly engage in dialogue, I seek knowing from an intellectual and feeling based perspective and strive to maintain a sense of balance. I notice that I am often navigating between dichotomies and wanting to show care. Can I synthesise these individual ideas into an approach for practice? Could these themes of connection, relationship, imagery, care giving, holding a space between me and other be melded into a whole orientation that would give me a new approach to practice that was congruent with my core values and would the process of finding a new offering help me to heal and adapt to my new reality?

I have tried these themes in a variety of settings; coaching, conversations, consulting interventions, and I have experimented with complexity by trying it out with different groups and numbers of people with whom I have differing degrees of relationship. I have found it has been sufficiently robust to carry me through the encounters and that outcomes have been mutually beneficial. I feel I am operating effectively and authentically in this space, not clouded by thoughts about what others might want to hear or wishing to promote my own egoic needs. The enabler for me to operate in this way has been allowing the phenomenon of mental imagery to inform my understanding. This has been central to the process and I became anxious that it was an intensely personal experience and therefore this way of working might not be making a general contribution, might not contribute or impact on the work of others. This seemed rather a problem, I needed to explore how I could purposefully make it available for other people to practice in this way. I wanted to explore whether I could synthesise the experience of mental imagery into the themes emerging in my working style, into a single working orientation with broad applicability, capable of yielding productive outcomes?

### **The Master Class - Case Study 12**

I would like you to listen to Chopin's Nocturne in E Flat whilst reading this piece. To me the music starts falteringly and steps tentatively along, checking the notes and seeking your feedback as much as showing you where it is going. The occasional flat note sounds a little incongruous but actually fits within the whole. The music gets a little braver and more confident towards the end. When it finds its own voice it really starts to fly and no longer needs to shout. This is how I would describe my inquiry journey so far.

The Doctoral process presented an opportunity to try this orientation that relies on mental imagery with a critical community. We are required to run a Master Class for

our cohort relating to our area of study. I intend to synthesise the themes from all the preceding case studies into a practice orientation. I want to test out the robustness and resilience of my approach, I have the chance to upscale it to see if it copes with the complexity of a larger group, the diversity of issues and personal styles and the unpredictability of trying to satisfy multifarious but as yet unidentified needs. Most importantly, I want to address this concern that mental imagery cannot be shared widely, I cannot find it described in literature in the way I experience it and I pathologise that it might indicate there is something wrong with me, that it is some manifestation of mental illness.

### **Establishing a Relationship**

A pre-cursor of getting into the relational space that underpins this approach, seems to require that we be vulnerable with each other, not holding up any barriers.

Although we are all known to each other as a cohort, we have not spent a great deal of time together, so I try to draw, accelerate and enrich relationships within the master class by making it a safe environment. I try to strike a balance between encouraging a bit of risk taking whilst drawing attention to our mutuality.

### **Creating a Space**

I have previously encouraged camaraderie in a team building exercise with a Board of Governors by suggesting some communal singing. This seemed like an innocent suggestion and I was startled at the reaction, how strongly people could feel about something that seemed relatively innocent to me. Given that it evoked such an emotional response I opt to use it in the master class setting to purposefully evoke emotions, get people responding with their head and heart. The participants are motivated to help; we all have to go through this with our inquiries so there is a good

deal of empathy and mutual support. They seem invested in the process, I lead the singing by teaching the group a chorus from a negro spiritual song, a style of music designed to engender camaraderie and intended for group singing, my intention is to emphasise harmony and the powerful effect of putting our voices alongside each other. I hope by putting myself in the vulnerable position of singing first, I can encourage others to take the leap of faith to join me in this space. I send a recording of the music out a few days before so that people are not surprised and know what is coming, give them the chance to object if they feel strongly this is something they don't want to do.

The group embrace the exercise warmly, even start making requests, there is a lot of laughter and the atmosphere feels warm and convivial.

### **Holding the Space Open**

Having coaxed people into a safe space I want to stimulate their whole selves so provide a range of art materials and spread a white sheet on the floor such that we can create an artwork together. In case this messiness is unappealing I also provide cloth and sewing materials.

Historically, sewing circles have been associated with non-competitive, mutually supportive environments intended to create more just societies. I notice in the painting people are keeping to their own corners of the white sheet, but the atmosphere remains warm and the sewing is taken up enthusiastically. One participant paints the sewing cloth, this momentarily irritates me and then I let it go, this is not about exerting control over the process, it's about holding open the space.

## Discovering Imagery

I try a gentle introduction to the idea of imagery; I am keen not to force anything or dictate pace. I ask people what arises “in the moment” in response to emotive words like “good marriage”, “democracy” and “flourishing”.

When it seems that the group is engaged with each other and the theme of the day, I ask the participants to pair up and to act as client and consultant to each other and for the client to share a current problem and the consultant to notice and share what images arise as they talk. This is what I record as the outcome when in plenary session; I do not need to know what problems were discussed, but I want to know people’s experience of imagery.

### Josie & Richard

Josie said she allowed images to influence the conversation in a productive way, sharing the images made sense of experiences and helped in positioning the self in relation to a dilemma. Richard reported feeling “no worse off” for privileging images in the encounter and that he was keen to do it again, and that this was a new way of relating, he noticed he wasn’t trying to process anything. Josie feels that other strategies may have closed down the conversation and wouldn’t have worked as well.

13.11.11 Richard subsequently writes...

“I am sorry I said this now because it sounds so negative when actually the exercise was a very positive experience. Josie acted as the ‘client’ and the most interesting thing for me was that several of the images I described to her were



ones she was having herself. The naming and sharing of these images appeared to move our conversation on into new perspectives for Josie.”

### **Helen & Steve**

Helen acted as the consultant and surfaced images that had meaning for Steve, the images helped with dialogue and more images arose as a result. Helen, a Psychotherapist, compared the experience to a therapy session where someone “takes the veil away” and pulls things into a simple but useful form. She described the experience as “condensing” a lot of information. She was left feeling unsure how she could use the approach because she experienced so many images and she didn’t want to interrupt the flow of Steve’s conversation. Imagery was particularly rich when she didn’t try to concentrate and allowed them to flow.

### **Andrew & Anne**

Andrew and Anne chose to go for a walk, they reported that they went looking for something but didn’t find it. Anne reports very little imagery, she is anxious about how easy working in the imaginal space might be with Andrew. She finds that images surfaced more easily when she let go of this anxiety and self-consciousness and gave herself permission not to try too hard.

### **Alex & Hartmut**

Alex and Hartmut intend to continue their conversation after the session has finished. Powerful images that Alex shared with Hartmut have enabled him to understand a relational dynamic relating to a private matter that is troubling him. The imagery enabled a level of abstraction that Alex reported as almost “comedic” but which did not trivialize the problem and allowed Hartmut to gain some distance and

perspective. Hartmut notices that using imagery in this way appears to be a skill which can be learnt over time, this seems to me to be a significant shift from his comments a year ago when we were in the same supervision group and I was trying to describe mental imagery and he told me that he “just didn’t get it”.

Overall, the day has gone better than I could have hoped.

### **Maintaining Balance**

The day after the workshop I am in a heightened emotional state. The workshop has gone well, I have been delighted about how readily the group have connected to mental imagery. I wake early and have a sense that I am floating away. I reach out to a co-inquirer who has a very grounding effect and text him for help to be pulled back to earth, he suggests I am spiritually elevated and need to ground myself. As I write this in my journal over breakfast outside at Ashridge, a participant from another course mistakes the ashtrays for a spittoon and coughs up a huge ball of phlegm right in front of me - my bubble is burst and I come crashing back to earth. Balance is restored. I need to remember this, that I attend to myself after these emotionally intense times.

### **Closing the Space**

When the group reconvenes I ask about their thoughts and reflections on the past 24 hours. Participants report unusually vivid dreams, Steve reports that his dreams had a more picture-like quality and that they were clearer than usual, running like films in his head, including a dream in which he was naked.

Alex reports more dreams including ships sailing, she has a heightened sense of

imagery and expresses a desire to use imagery in coaching. Helen says she feels more at peace than she did when she arrived at the start of the workshop and describes a sense of “wholesomeness”. Kathleen says that when she is asked for images she gets feelings and vice versa. I feel like the group has risen up like a vortex of energy in the exercise and this post-process review is soothing and sorting. We remain in relation with each other but the connection is purposefully broken so that we might be enabled to leave this sacred space.

### **Bringing this Orientation into Practice**

This doctorate had started as a way to be curious about an ongoing issue with grief. I had felt it was obstructing my practice to be constantly processing this traumatic event in the forefront of my mind, it didn't seem like a healthy process was underway.

Whilst I had rationalised in my logical mind that I had built a good life for myself, albeit it wasn't the one I planned, I could never have prepared myself for the wide ranging impact of change or its unpredictable course. I was choice-less and I had felt I had no control over my response and I wanted to look into that. The deeper my reflection of this is as an experience of change, the more I came to feel this was an experience with broader application and I wondered what learning could be extracted that I could use to the benefit of others. Logic and Reasoning made perfect sense but failed to give answers, Psychological models failed to comfort me. The outer layers were soothed but still this constant nagging process remained at my core. I needed to be able to look at my grief in a way that gave some sense of peace to that core so that I could always acknowledge this dreadful thing happened that was very difficult, and yet move forward in a more positive way. I clung to the felt sense that there was an orientation, a way of being, a way to live that would afford me peace rather than a

framework or model that would add another level of bleak and oblique obscurity. This orientation would need to be able to withstand the unpredictable, the uncontrollable, the unexpected and the pain of this monumental change. If I could identify this orientation that would enable me to enter into my grief, I felt I would be able to enter into any situation and be alongside my client in the most uncomfortable and difficult circumstances. To be able to support and facilitate their darkest hours, their bleakest difficulties, be truly companionably alongside without the urge to run away. Not just sharing the warm convivial times when we perceived things were going well. This was what my consulting practice had lacked, my IT projects went well so I didn't have to indwell with anything more than minor irritations and entanglements. What my gut was telling me was that the human condition of avoiding unpleasantness was why consulting interventions were not providing fundamental reparation to knotty problems. Palatable solutions and superficial fixes were alleviating in the moment dissonance but not fixing the core. These were the themes that had helped me and that were showing up in my smaller case studies:

### **The Themes of my Work Orientation**

- That working to get to know someone was primary and a precursor to any work starting, and that relationship was a precursor to being truly in connection. Being in connection with someone means entering freely and unfettered into a special inter-subjective space for a way of relating that feels qualitatively different to normal discourse. I privilege relationships and being in connection, I work to create a space in which participants can truly engage in dialogue.
- That I use mental imagery to understand and to be understood. This is both in terms of evaluating the nature of our relationship and whether we are in paralysis or in flow. Central to this approach has been allowing the phenomenon of mental

imagery to inform me. In bereavement it enabled me to articulate the emotional and physical pain of loss.

- That the empirical model is so deeply engrained, I spent a significant part of this inquiry looking for a way to prove mental imagery - to explain it in scientific terms of cause and effect. I was curious that I didn't think I would be believed otherwise. In noticing how much time I had spent trying to establish the cause of Mental Imagery and that rather than find any answer, I realised how imprinted the empirical paradigm was, how it could hide in plain sight. This alerted me to be ever mindful of the truths I harboured and how deep they could run. Having finished the Masters course I was ready to reject the empirical model, but with deeper reflection I realise I need to still be able to offer this style of consulting to meet people where they are at, to gain their acceptance and in balance with the more spiritual connected, transpersonal way of working.
- I have a need for deep understanding and to be understood. In my case this is facilitated by relying more on mental imagery and less on cognitive, rational thought.
- That there are small pivotal moments that can trip the whole of the experience, for me these are usually moments of showing care, in particular through food and nurture.
- That I embrace diversity as a way to achieve balance. I began to wonder if all paradigms were speaking the same truths, just in different languages. That I could take bits from different ontological perspectives and sit them alongside each other in a way that didn't infer conflation, that I felt truculent and un-cooperative about categorisation. I realised how much I celebrated diversity and keeping a balance whether that be between different sources of knowledge, ways of thinking or team members. I seek knowing from an intellectual and feeling-based perspective and strive to maintain a sense of balance.
- How unstoppable I become when speaking my own 'truth'. How prepared to challenge the authority of others in a way that I never have before. Once I felt I

had discovered a pure form of the fundamental nature of things, how I came to perceive Reality, the primacy I gave to perception, how much I needed to be understood. I became extremely intolerant of what I perceived as facsimiles of reality such as metaphors, artefacts and rituals, my own ego, things that I perceived could distort pure perception.

- This experiential, unfurling way of finding out about the world seems a clear departure from more measured ‘fact-finding’ ways of receiving reality but, Heron refers to experiential knowing as the ground for all other forms of knowing; “depending as it does on feeling and emotion, intuition and imagery” (Lyle Yorks, 2002, p. 182).

Imagery is most poignant and effortless when it is accompanied by a sense of boundarylessness, the sense of merging with other.

This is central to the process, I feel I am operating effectively and authentically in this space.

I want to purposefully bring them into my practice, actively apply them rather than passively allow them to emerge, in order to see if I can make this a practical consulting offering.

### ***The Larger Case Studies – Combining the Elements***

This section is much more complex than the smaller case studies. I approach with trepidation and something similar to fear, some anticipation. “Mars” from “The Planet Suite” by Gustav Holst captures this lurching yet exhilarating feeling. It appears to die off at one point and then gradually picks up, mirroring my drive to stay with sometimes uncomfortable situations. It’s a musical battleground at times, all

kinds of instruments wanting to have their say, bit of a tussle at times, occasionally I want to flinch at the noise. It all ends well, if abruptly, this sums up this case study.

## **Professional Practice at the Trade Union**

The small case studies helped me identify what was important to me; what were the characteristics of work that I felt was going well. They identified themes that I tested for robustness and broad application in the Master Class. Now that I have identified the orientation I want, I take it into consulting interventions in my recent work. I want to demonstrate its potential usefulness to others.

## **Applying the themes at a Trade Union**

The first is an account of a piece commissioned by a Trade Union. The Union had recently tried to take Industrial Action and balloted its members. With no real track record in taking Action, they found the process incredibly effortful. A number of Organisational issues were surfaced in the process – a lack of strategy, working unconnectedly in silos with huge communication difficulties across departments, poor data and management information, a lack of process, doubts raised about their function as a Union organisation. Despite the potentially paralysing effects of these obstacles they had pulled together relationally and held a successful ballot. Even then, with agreement to strike achieved, the planned Action failed to materialise. The whole experience had felt like a total setback and had left them demoralised and wondering what to do next. Although concerned about a very tight timeframe, we agreed to hold a half day workshop to find out what lessons could be learned from what had happened that could be used for a better future. I look for the clues in this picture of where we might make a contribution and conclude that with the way they had pulled together in the past and their willingness to hold this workshop indicated



that they were in flow with each other and that our work was to create the right space where they could be vulnerable and trust each other, speak openly about their successes and failures.

### **Establishing a Relationship**

My co-worker, who has invited me to help with this piece, is a couple of meetings ahead of me with the client and in the familiarity and warmth I observe, there is clearly a strong relationship forming. When the client, my friend and I sit down together to obtain a briefing, I feel very little connection to the client. I'm familiar with the feeling of being on the outside so in the first instance I work to establish my own connection and relationship such that I might become a part of this group. I purposefully let her lead and support in any way I can during the conversation.

My co-worker, Carol, feeds back:

“You were a great support. Just by having you there I felt more confident. I always feel that you are more ‘grown up’ than me in business speak stuff. What I noticed was that you were able to respond much better to the client’s colleague than me. You gave responses that put him at ease and reassured him. I remember that you and he shared some sort of repartee joke that I didn’t get at all! I recognised that I had taken the lead so I was very keen to make sure your voice and expertise was also in the room. That opportunity came with the conversation about AI. You really had them hooked.”

### **Creating Balance**

The client goes ahead with the work and we design the workshop. There is very little time in the session to achieve everything we want to do so our attention focuses on

setting out the timing and squeezing the maximum from the half day. The process feels very practical, almost scientific. In our heads we are imagining things like when people will need a break, how long it will take to read things, how long to move around the room and so on. I feel we are privileging very rational activity and I am curious about what we are perceiving from the client that is holding us in that space.

Carol responds “True. We were squeezing a quart into a pint pot. I do tend to be very analytic, I need to be able to picture the session. It’s probably (certainly) part of my defence against anxiety.”

I notice I haven’t paid much attention to how I feel emotionally about the day, that seems odd, that’s usually where I start. In order to think about the participants as living, breathing people with wants and needs and an emotional response to the subject matter, the evening before the workshop, when there is still some administrative stuff to attend to, I purposefully sit quietly in my room at home. I take a deep breath, drop quietly back into the silence, normally this would be the time when imagery would arise that would inform my emotional life. There is nothing, despite the fact that imagery is rich in other areas of my life; when I think about the Trade Union all is blank.

### **Showing Care and Creating a Space**

It’s the day of the workshop. It is normal for me to be warm and welcoming and try to show care, but I notice I privilege this way of working in this setting, creating a connection with those who seem awkward and shy in conversation, smiling warmly, greeting people and finding out about them, sympathizing with their aches and pains, hearing problems, making coffee. I purposefully focus on engaging to a greater extent than is normal for me.

My co-inquirer responds “You were absolutely brilliant at all of this. I watched you making people feel welcome and relaxed. I admired the easy way you greeted people and how warmly they responded to you. Meanwhile, I was having an anxiety hot flush!!”

## **Forms of Knowing**

We have asked the participants to create some stories from their experience as pre-work and the stories are alive and vital and full of positivity, whilst still acknowledging and respecting the negative aspects of the ballot process. They are not unemotional in their writing but I make meaning from the lack of imagery and my feelings of being excluded in the client meeting as somehow indicative of a lack of openness and honesty and frankness. Something is missing relationally and I hold this thought lightly with the intention of checking it out on the day.

When I get up on the day of the workshop I notice I am drawn to choose something quite soft and feminine to wear. When I meet up with my co-facilitator she too has dressed in a softer feminine style. I have a strong desire to hold the space open and make this a safe place for people to be vulnerable in and honest with each other, to honour a feminine, relational way of being.

The energy in the room bursts into life. My co-facilitator and I purposefully hold the space open by standing at either ends of the room, the warmth between us and how we engage with each other seems to cross over into what feels like a shared space. Carol writes; “I agree. I was aware that we were holding the space and keeping it safe. I noticed how we managed to move about the room too and cross over without it ever feeling like we got in each other’s way.”

## Closing the Space

The Commissioning client seems really pleased and says three times how happy she is with our work. Towards the end of the session the energy level is so high and so palpable that I wonder how we are going to bring it down.

Carol notices;

“That took a lot of holding. You handled all the responses and allowed them time. Although I was scribing I also wanted to try and hold the space for you somehow and be present to back you if needed, but I didn’t want to intervene and say much which I felt would disrupt the rapport you were holding with the group”.

In the final exercise the air starts to calm and clear and so I read the room and suggest to my co-facilitator that we close the session with some solo work rather than whip up the frenzy by completing the group work that we had planned.

Carol’s response to my felt sense was “And you were absolutely correct too.”

We check it out with the client, the atmosphere is soothed and calm and it feels ok to send people back out into the world. Still this nagging doubt about the relationships, I observe a couple of “spats” between couples when we encourage some pairings, a certain amount of finger pointing, the theme of blame and trust comes up in plenary. When we invite them to envisage the ideal Union of the future they say it is one where there is trust and accountability but not blame, this is what I notice but, of course, this could be what I am looking for.

Carol comments;

“It was definitely there. There were some tensions between a number of characters I think.”

The theme of “disconnect” between groups gets cited frequently and we suggest in our follow up report that there is an opportunity to explore relational working styles more deeply. The lack of mental imagery causes me to make the judgement that although at face value this is relationally strong, there is a deeper level that is yet to be attained.

Nevertheless, the workshop feels like the start of something and the timing doesn’t feel right to delve much more deeply in this session. The participants are invited to go ‘off-piste’ if they want to but, after a bit of free debate, we get back on course with what we planned. The finger pointing is reflected back to them and acknowledged.

The plan is for the workshop to end with a lunch together and I take my time tidying up the room, having no desire to sit and engage in small talk or “entertain” in some way after what has been an emotionally exhausting time for me. When we do finally join them in the dining room it seems the group has chosen not to sit together and they are split in small groups around the room. I am grateful for the opportunity to sit quietly with my co-facilitator and plan how and when to feedback on the session. I am exhausted.

Carol adds, “I was absolutely exhausted too, drained in fact would be an appropriate word... I think this shows how much energy we used and how much potentially negative energy we were fielding in the session.”

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## Mental Imagery

Carol and I are commissioned to report back on our impressions of the workshop we have facilitated.

We spend the morning working together really productively, despite a large amount of data to sift through, the report has spilled out easily and we seem in agreement about the salient points, our recommendations and overall what we want to say.

I ask Carol how she feels about how we worked together and she responds “We got through it all remarkable smoothly, it was one of the easiest pieces of joint writing I have ever done.”

We both feel quite happy to leave the work at 3pm with the intention of sleeping on it and tidying it up the next day. Carol knows how I work with images and asks me if I have any image for this work; I have a fast flowing river in mind, “I thought it was a great image and summarised all of the work perfectly as well as holding a challenge for them for the future.”

There is some feeling of having stirred up grit and gravel. I place the image into the space between us and we explore and expand on it together, finally offering it in our report in the following format:

## Post Script

Carol and Rosemary like to work with metaphor as a means of enriching understanding.

The metaphor that came to mind here was one of a river, the stream of water was the day to day business of the (Union), the river was temporarily swollen by the inclusion of the Industrial Action on top of Business As Usual, almost to the point of bursting its banks. In the process of becoming fuller it became faster and more energised and even as the level has settled, some of the effects are still being felt downstream.

This flood of activity inevitably stirred up some sediment making the water less clear for a while and exposing some of the gravel and grit in the river bed, some stones have shifted and even if the river flow returns to normal the bed it runs over has been changed creating different currents and rivulets.

There remain some large boulders that will either be shifted very gradually by the weathering effect of the water, depending on the energy and speed of flow, or we can try and move some of the boulders such that they don't cause weeds and debris to get trapped in them and the life and health of the river is maintained.

We offer this metaphor as an holistic view of the system and this piece of work as we encountered it.

I notice my reaction to the word metaphor is congruent with how I feel when people try to create realities with rituals and artefacts. Metaphor is not how I really like to describe my mental imagery, the reason being it is to me a post-lingual device, the product of cognitive processes that we have filtered and applied our own biases to. Imagery, on the other hand, seems more pre-lingual, less contrived or chosen and therefore more informing of the situation rather than my mental models. I am content to use it here rather than have to explain what seems, even to me, the somewhat whacky machinations of my psychic life. Although I feel a certain contentment at a job well done in the design of the workshop, the facilitation and the quality of the subsequent report, it is the sharing of this mental image that gives me



the greatest satisfaction. The report, and so on, have some superficial quality and leave me with a hunger to ‘get underneath’ and surface some difficult and unspoken truths that I feel are still present in the system. I feel the image offers a route to get to these truths that is not confrontational and potentially allows the client to move to this more difficult space at their own speed. Of course, having made the offer it rests with the client as to whether they want to join us there. The workshop felt good and the facilitation fine, I felt proud to submit the report, but the opportunity afforded by the ‘metaphor’ seems to offer so much more.

My colleague confirms my sense that the use of the facilitative power of the image to add something qualitatively to the power of our report, she writes;

“I felt an absolute certainty that it needed to be included.”

### **Consulting at the Public Sector Department (TD)**

The department (TD) provides an HR service across the Public sector. There is no mandate to procure their services but, given the degree of reform going on at the moment in response to global economic crisis and the efficiency cuts reducing headcounts, there is in theory a strong incentive to. Ideally TD should have the expertise and market knowledge that makes their offer and their ability to gain economies of scale.

I am asked at about 48 hours compelling notice if I can stand in for someone to facilitate a large group meeting between TD and their potential clientele. Their client in this instance is a Leaders Council, some 50 senior personnel. The intention of the meeting is to refine the design of a central IT system procured by TD that can be used in client departments.

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## Establishing a Relationship

Much of the design work for the day has already been done, I glance over the papers I am sent. Rather than pay attention to the detail I try to breathe the piece in and get some sense of the energy of the writing. I see the person I am standing in for has tried to encourage a more narrative approach. I do find it difficult to join something that is already in flow, that I haven't been involved in from the start. I am trying to balance and honour the work already done but I feel really apprehensive about the negativity in the writing and choice of language. Words like "constraints", "resistance", "sensitivities" and "unacceptable" jump off the page at me and my experience suggests that a large group has the capacity to amplify any prevailing mood. I anticipate a vortex of negativity, and this is not the sort of space that gives rise to creative solutions. I speak to the member of the TD who is running the day and suggest some more Appreciative style questions, some inquiry into what their customer values about working with them. Her response to this suggestion is also negative; feedback is that Appreciative Inquiry as an approach fails to yield specific outputs and that if asked it is unlikely the Leaders would have anything positive to say about working with TD. The gloom around her response does nothing to allay my concerns, and I feel dismayed that I have not been able to make a connection with her.

I hold this response as data, I could have been more assertive, pursued the conversation further but I wanted to be in a dialogic space with this client, build a relationship so that she can trust me and feel I will support her in the meeting. It feels to me that the system has already been disturbed by this last minute change of facilitator. I don't know this client well enough to stand my ground, but the environment is one where it is very difficult to make challenge and maintain relationship. The previous facilitator is a respected member of staff, her input and

design decisions will have been made thoughtfully and with care and with a much greater knowledge of the context. Weighing all these things up I decide on balance not to disrupt things any further, to get behind the client and support them in any way I can.

## Creating a Space

The day of the meeting looms, I go in plenty early to help set up the room, demonstrate my willingness to do everything I can to make the day a success, the client seems to appreciate my practical support. I soak up the atmosphere, the room seems prestigious but the acoustics are dreadful. I wonder whether we are going to be able to hear each other, literally and figuratively. I am told this is not the room TD originally booked and I make some meaning that they have been ‘bumped’ from their first choice. My TD client seems to be quite positive and enthusiastic but this feels very ‘brave face’ to me and I notice I am feeling a bit gloomy. The client has set up the day to do most of the presenting between herself and her colleagues, I ask her to let me know if in the moment she needs more support from me or wants me to do anything differently. I reflect that I don’t know her well enough to know instinctively how to support her.

TD’s clients start arriving, the turnout is somewhat less than expected. I mingle and chat to people but real connection is minimal. The participants naturally fall into groups and are asked to prioritise system functionality according to Gold/Silver/Bronze. I sit with one group of TD’s clients and notice the negativity of the comments. I use an appreciative style to surface and discuss their tensions; basically they are not system users, it doesn’t make sense for them to be here.

I move to another group, they seem to be slow to get going but with a few promptings from me the ball seems to start rolling and the group gets quite animated, the energy

feels quite buzzy, the space feels open and we are in flow. At the third remaining table the energy is steady, I pick up some of the post-it notes to help get things started, but the head of the service takes them off me. They seem “on task” so I carry on circling, interjecting where I can to keep things flowing and writing about how I am experiencing the meeting to use for reflection later.

## Balance

I feel good about how I am able to contribute and I am clearer about my overall feeling of unease; this is not a good way to collect user requirements. I long to reconnect to my IT Consulting days, now I am clearer about what the day is trying to achieve I can sense a mismatch between the approach and the desired outcomes. The format is unstructured and there are too many people. Requirements gathering needs to be far more restricted, tighter and binary, mirroring the way an IT system works. This environment is encouraging free-flowing creativity, the sort of thing that encourages blue sky aspirational thinking. This is fine when creating a concept model, a vision of how things might be, but it will not generate outcomes that can be mapped onto a computer. The lack of structure to the day has held us in the creative and emotional space, we really need to pull back into the rational/logical if the meeting is to achieve its objectives.

Unsurprisingly, the participants have taken a low risk approach. To calm their anxieties about the system not meeting their requirements, given that they are in a state of change and don't know what the future will look like, they have classified pretty much everything as a definite system requirement. This seems an entirely predictable outcome, the culture is one of fear and uncertainty, future requirements

cannot be predicted, the group have been given no rules by which to choose, prioritise or to select their requirements, so in answer to the question “what do you want” they had said they wanted it all. The meeting does not appear to have yielded any useful information, rather than balance cost with requirements, the users have totally sided with requirements. We are sitting on a seesaw with 50 users on one end and a small team of providers dangling in mid air at the other. I attribute this risk averse behaviour on the part of the users to a lack of relationship with the provider, feeling if they were working together cooperatively each would be shaping the other, a trust would exist and the requirements gathering could be a gently nurtured cyclical crop rather than a single plant harvested in a single swipe of the scythe, expected to meet the requirements of all the seasons.

## Knowing

The temperature of the room starts to drop, the Head of the Service asks attendees to gather round the flip chart. This was not in the plan. I feel concerned about trying to get 35 or so participants to gather meaningfully and productively around one small flip chart. I decide in the moment that the best contribution I can make is to prompt some reflection about how ambitious the requirements are. I start to try to organise them into groups; Process, Management Information, Security, Access. As this is unscripted, it is not at all clear who should be leading this session.

The Head of Service (HOS) speaks from the back of the room “It would appear Rosemary has some ideas.” It feels like a muddled and bloated pigs bladder from a particularly early and primitive forefather of football has been lobbed in my direction and instinctively I have caught it. The room feels like the muddy pitch of a football game, my feet are stuck in thick and squelchy mud. I am so in the mire of noticing the nature of the relationships, the people who shouldn’t be here, not wanting to challenge the clients’ authority in front of their customers, thinking “there is so much

going on in this moment”, trying not to be all “told you so”, that I am paralysed and left wondering what to do.

I realise I am very much in the spotlight, my ego strives to protect me from what feels like a deeply vulnerable situation, I am holding the ball and the opposing teams are thundering towards me. In the process of feeling this vulnerable I am no longer able to hold the space open.

### **Establishing Balance**

I search for a place that feels safe, try to extricate myself from the mud so that I can get back into a facilitation mode. I talk briefly about my IT background and how rich the functionality is that has been specified and what the likely cost implications would be. Privileging this knowledge grounds me and calms my emotional state, showing expertise and control calms the room. Knowing this subject as I do gives me authority and a sense of certainty in what feels like a very uncertain space. The ref blows the whistle and the result is “action: cost models required, more information needed”.

### **Authentic Response**

In terms of realising the objectives of the day, this cannot be considered a “good” meeting. My instinct is to tidy up (the room, myself); I could walk away at this stage. I was asked to facilitate, I facilitated, I did all I could, paid attention, took every opportunity to help, supported and advised from the site of the experiences that I have. This approach would not be me acting authentically in service of my client. The depth of service I seek to provide is to hold the space open, however uncomfortable it is, and to see what learning we can extract from here, making it as

safe and as comfortable as possible. I want to be in the generative space that is neither too comfortable that change is not desired nor too uncomfortable that change becomes impossible. I invite the members of TD who are there to have a conversation about how the meeting has been for them. Their sponsoring Manager makes a few platitudes, touches the HOS on the shoulder and says “well done”, then departs. I am curious at his lack of support in what feels like a crisis time. My contact person maintains her cheerful positive outlook and the Head of Service comments that we have done all this work once before.

We are not in the generative place, it is too uncomfortable. I have invited them into a dialogue but for reasons that I surmise such as I don’t have a strong relationship with them and this is too soon, we are in shock, I reason the timing is not right. The air feels crunchy with things left unsaid but my instinct is that this is too raw, I feel like a piece of bacon being rubbed with a particularly coarse rock salt.

Upon leaving the room I ring the person who appointed me, a friend who knows me well, understands my way of working. I tell her the image I have of the meeting is that of a walnut to crack a sledge hammer, a totally disproportionate and inappropriate tool to achieve its desired outcomes. She asks me how I am feeling emotionally, in the moment I say I am fine and I kind of do feel fine although I reflect later that I think I was numb with shock, reflecting something of what I imagine was going on for the client.

I continue to reflect on the whole experience, momentarily I feel responsible for not turning the meeting around into a joyous, highly productive venture. As I have since learned more of the history and the relationships, I reason logically that only a megalomaniac could have believed themselves capable of such Canute-like abilities. I am responsible for displaying a certain naivety in going into this, I am annoyed at



myself for not giving more primacy to the uneasy feelings I had at the start and not trusting my felt sense more.

The responsible thing to do now seems to stay with the client in this discomfort. I find I am holding the difficult feelings so acutely now that I need to sort out what is going on for me before I can offer to be in service of them. I sit for a couple of days paralysed by the experience, pondering the best way forward.

I can't do this on my own, I bump into a friend I haven't seen for a while and invite her for coffee, she is a good and close friend but I would also describe her as a very cool and logical thinker. In this moment I feel really emotional and full of care and concern for my client. Heavily situated in my emotional state and paralysed I reach out to this calm logical person to redress my balance and restore flow in myself. I disclose what has happened, she discloses some things from her consulting life that leave difficult memories, the sharing of our mutual vulnerabilities creates a sense of connection for me and I feel less alone. We laugh a bit about some things, particularly a meeting that she recounts to me in which she sat silently when in reality she wishes she had spoken up. In the conviviality of this relationship, a millstone in my mind, a seemingly particularly suitable image given the idiom of a millstone round one's neck, slowly grinds into action, the weight and the friction and the effortfulness all holds meaning. Most importantly I am gradually shifted back into flow.

I resolve to journal the experience and see what comes out on the page, the emotional intensity is somewhat lost in the process of recalling it and writing it down, something has cooled in the space between the meeting and now that makes the whole experience more containable.

**Journal entry:**

*“It seemed to me that the customer was not really being listened to, that they were being shut down, closed off, contained. I heard them say some very reasonable things, showing understanding for the operating environment of TD, saying they realised they might not get everything they want and needed to find commonality of requirements. I would have been pleased to have found a user community expressing such reasonableness, I didn’t hear that understanding being returned.*

*I noticed the predominantly negative feelings I had from the day were disproportionate, somewhat reflecting the room – there was some positivity which outweighed the negativity, but the negative voices were louder, leaving early they were highly impactful. Pulling apart the negativity it even emerged that some of those comments were from a mismatch between the ambitions of the meeting and the desires of the attendees.”*

**Figure 32 Reflective journaling in the Public Sector**

When I look back over this journal entry I notice a redressing of the balance, seeing both sides more, my client and their client, a more dialogic orientation. I realise I can only see this when I have calmed my emotional state and anchored myself in a more rational space.

**Holding the Space**

When I think of the part I played on this meeting and compare it to the model I am developing, I feel I have not been true to what I set out to do. I did not privilege the relationship, I allowed myself to be swept up in the urgency of the requirement and did not take the time to build a relationship first before approaching the work. Could I have built a relationship in this timeframe? My gut feeling is no. Can I do anything at this stage about that? I resolve to try.

I resolve to share with my client my experience of the meeting as viewed through my calm and rational mind. I write and mention the different levels of energy between the tables, the early departure of some participants, the sense I had made of the experience and invited her to have a conversation such that we might make sense together. I mentioned the calm logical facts about users and costs and functionality and advocated establishing a closer relationship with their client. The overall email sounded quite calm.

Extract from email to Client L of Department TD

“things that stood out for me were low mood... the frustration that many seemingly productive conversations were not tipping over into a commitment to use the service... roll-outs had been somewhat painful... You told me you felt there was a greater consensus than had previously been achieved and that you could see some benefit to "Painting the Vision".”

The response came back very quickly, quite unusual in this setting. I feel reassured about there being some relationship forming between us from the warm tone:

“I’d welcome a chat with you re your summary (very useful and interesting to have your perspective) ....If you can let me know your availability, I’ll make a point of booking in some time – you’ll find I’ve left a message on your voicemail too. With best wishes.”

The HOS when invited to respond gives a curt one line answer and my friend, who I am effectively working for, expresses misgivings about the work. On the whole, she seems to be giving me the benefit of the doubt. I am holding the space open, I feel a hook, my authentic self is determined to see this through even though my ego wants to run for the hills. I have some sense this could be good for both of us.

We have our conversation, the millstone starts to grind, the HOS who was acting into the role is not given the post substantively which may explain the shortness of her response. The relationship between myself and undauntingly cheerful client deepens to one of genuine affection and seemingly greater trust, she expresses interest in my company name and we move to a deeper level of disclosure. The developing relationship between us feels like the place I should have started from.

I am invited back to do further work. A new Head of Service is appointed (NHOS) and I am invited to the first team meeting. Again I am given minimal briefing, I sketch out a rough outline. The former Head of Service is there and turns away from me; I touch her on the arm and greet her warmly and she turns back to me. I am surprised what a change this small gesture makes and how previously I would have internalised and felt hurt by her rejection.

The meeting goes well, I feel able to respond to the NHOS, support him well, anticipate his facilitation needs, let the meeting ebb and flow without anxiety. I also notice the immense pull on the NHOS by the team members.

When the meeting ends I relay this to the NHOS, he discloses confidential data about his plans for the team and I feel very trusted and like a deep rapport has been established.

I continue to journal to help me with my sense-making. I write as if I am having the opportunity to sit with the new Head of Service and speak freely about how I feel rather than what I think:

*“When it came to the second day with TD, the day in which NHOS was setting out his stall with his team, this felt like something the team were very hungry for. I purposefully did not offer to type up or distribute the agenda, I wanted this to feel like a different meeting and I think I had some feeling that this was a “holding” agenda not something we were going to enact.”*

*“I’m really happy in the meeting that we went off-Agenda, the meeting became “ours” and we were able to respond in the moment to perceived need. I felt responsive and facilitative rather than directive and that feels right to me that that is the space I should have occupied. I noticed however that we went off-piste at your behest, and the desire to be led re-emerged and started to feel like a real pull”.*

*“The imagery in this case felt like some kind of settlement being guarded atop a hill. The walls to the settlement are not impermeable but the overriding impression I have is one of static maintenance of the status quo.*

*L feels like someone who has found an escape hatch in the encampment wall and is offering me a route in. I feel if I entered in I might be absorbed and hence I have asked a colleague to think with me about this work, such that she might hold my ankles whilst I dangle over the top!”*

*“I felt privileged at the openness with which you shared your feelings about the day, but I also noticed that your focus was on the relationships amongst team members, your observations I could share; the team did not make eye contact with each other or build on each other’s ideas in the ways one might expect of a high performing team. L has disclosed that there are difficulties amongst team members and indeed J was fascinated that you had spotted this in the moment on the day.... as long as they have irritations with each other they are prevented from engaging with their customers.*

*When I suggested to L that it might be useful to start the Leaders Council with an appreciative inquiry into the relationship between TD and its customers, L expressed fear that in answer to the question “tell me about a time when you have worked well with TD” might be met with a stony silence. I heard enough on the day to feel that this would not be the case, but I feel there is a fear here of being vulnerable, taking a risk, being receptive to the outside world. From an Organisation Development (OD) perspective it feels to me that this is where the work is; enabling that relationship in a safe a productive way. Given the opportunity to experience safe and invigorating relationships with the outside world might mean some of the internal difficulties melt away.*

*Initially I had the intention to share them with NHOS but instead worked reflectively with an OD colleague from the same organisation to synthesize it.”*

*The journal provides the opportunity for catharsis in my emotional outpouring, but I want to respond in a language that will enable relationship building.*

**Figure 33 Journaling the Public Sector Experience**

Hello NHOS

Since our meeting last week I’ve been doing a lot of reflection about how the OD team can support TD going forward.

I’ve really enjoyed working with the team, it has been both professionally challenging and personally rewarding and I am left with a feeling of optimism that there is some great work to be done here.

I had some reflections after the Leaders Council, the main themes I noticed were:

-attendees saying they couldn't comment on how a system should be designed as they were too senior to be using it on a daily basis;

-the loudness of the negative feelings in the room that obstructed the work and the positive comments;

- that rather than customer requirements being gathered, more energy seemed to be being spent on expectations being managed.

This left me feeling there was something systemically wrong with how the team was engaging with its customer.

I admired your team for the resilience they displayed in this challenging atmosphere. When we met last week the most dominant thing I noticed was a pull for leadership and a team dynamic that wholly looked to you rather than to each other for affirmation and confirmation.

I feel the two sets of observations are connected, I feel that if they were to experience productive customer relationships there would be some confidence building in the team and that this would have an unlocking effect on the current dynamic which to me feels rather static at present.

I wonder if it might be helpful for us to spend some time together to talk through these reflections in more detail and how we might take things forward.

I have a chat with NHOS, I call him a couple of weeks later and he tells me my timing is perfect and invites me into another meeting the next day. I feel a greater sense of connection.



During the meeting he asks me to comment on the quality of discourse, he is in “tell” mode, a logical, rational approach space that seems appropriate for a team in crisis. He draws graphs and disregards them but I fetch them out of the bin and add to them, he takes them away, the space feels totally co-creative. He mouths “thank you” to me over the table. I feel I have made the move from facilitator to trusted advisor as he shares more of his plans and ideas that he asks me not to disclose.

The connection feels in place and this gives me the confidence to want to move the terms of the engagement on.

I suggest there is space now following this rationality period to move to a more emotional space. This grounded, down to earth former member of the transport department entirely accepts what I say and asks for some more detail on what I think might be helpful. I propose supporting him with:

- 1) One-to-one coaching of individual team members. Reinforcing positive behaviours that recognise interdependence, team working and inner leadership and manifest in energy, drive, ambition and resilience.
- 2) Organisation redesign using strategy led or process led techniques that ensure the strategic intent of the department is reflected in structure and that the ethos that you are encouraging is reflected in the design.
- 3) An appreciative piece with the leadership team to get off to a collaborative and energetic start that will carry through the team into positive stakeholder engagement.

He writes back almost immediately, agreeing to the further work and signs off with: “You lift my spirits!”

NHOS

I run the workshop, presenting it as an Organisation Design piece and a discussion of how our values play into the design principles. The NHOS has told me that there is a great deal of antipathy between two of the team, to the point they cannot work together and this is impacting on team performance. I am nervous in the moment, the air feels pregnant with possibility. I get very little imagery which leaves me wondering if the work on values and behaviours has gone deep enough. It feels like something may have been started, the NHOS asks me after what sense of progress I have, I suggest it will take time. I am wondering whether I should have been braver in the room, confronted the issue. But NHOS has not disclosed all the details, I have made efforts to build a relationship with both protagonists – one is returning to work after long term sick leave and I check out with her what needs she has that I can accommodate in the room. The other is still reeling from performing the Head of Service role in a caretaker capacity but not securing the role substantively. Given that she seemed to appreciate friendly gestures, I sit next to her and we chat a bit. I say my feelings are there is work to be done, but what I really want is to know how it has been for the two co-workers, because what is going on is in the bond between them and energetically I am not part of that system. I become flattered at being asked to be “expert” and my ego takes over, the connection breaks and the space snaps shut.

## **5. Conclusion/Creative Synthesiser Has it been helpful to me?**

I feel on the other side of what I wanted to discover, to have found my voice in what feels like a very authentic way makes me feel extremely joyful. A very literal piece of music for this section: “I’m all over it” by Jamie Cullum. His references to the song going round in his head, being dragged down at the knees, his determination to move forward, these themes resonate strongly. Even when he sings that he is all over

it now, he doesn't sound callous or uncaring, just free to move on, with the final recognition that something still moves him inside.

## Practice Development

I have a clear idea of what work I do best and why I like it. I have a clear offering. When I look back over this work I can see themes that consistently show up in my practice, this gives me the opportunity to present a model of my way of working:

### *Model of Relational Consulting*

#### Relationship

- In the first instance I seek a relationship before starting the work and from that relationship derive a sense of connection. Working this way either provides a foundation of trust from which to build on future work, so that in the difficult times there is something to underpin our working, or it serves to highlight that I am not the right person for the job, in which case we can part company without having incurred expense or bad feelings. In the time pressure of the TD case study I didn't have the chance to do that and I think that manifested itself in the very difficult nature of the meeting. In my introduction I refer to the story with George and how on the strength of our relationship we were able to ride out difficult times.

#### Connection

- Being in relationship enables a sense of connection, this connection is the precursor to entering a space together in which we can do work. This connection needs to be maintained whilst the work continues. It is distinct from relationship in that the connection ceases when the work ends and yet the sense of relationship carries on. These moments are filled with vulnerability and trust.

### **Authenticity**

- I want to do my best for my client, to act with authenticity and integrity, to see things through, this includes the feeling of having connected to my authentic self. My feelings about operating with Authenticity/integrity removes all feelings of self-consciousness, freeing me up to operate with a certainty of having connected to my “truth”. Authenticity for me is being able to distinguish between what is really occurring in the moment and being conscious and mindful of the lens that I might be seeing it through. When I am operating with authenticity I meet with very little resistance, I don’t need to employ clever influencing skills nor cajole; as humans it seems we are wired to sense when someone is speaking from heart and we are receptive to this.

### **Holding the Space**

- In connection, I strive to hold open a space in which we may be able to do the work. This can be even quite uncomfortable personally in terms of emotional investment as it was with TD and the Singing Lesson case studies, and may be required for a protracted and turbulent period. In that space I need to take care of my own sense of balance, looking inwards before looking outwards, both for myself when troubled by the first meeting with TD and then for TD when dealing with relational difficulties within their own team. Balance is about feeling the emotional turmoil and using that as data but then responding back in a calmer and more rational self. I journal, consult and collaborate such that I can choicefully occupy these two either/or states.

### **Maintaining Flow**

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By maintaining balance and holding the space open I am continually checking for evidence of flow, I am looking for paralysis that might manifest in a number of ways, for example:

- in my own internal bad feelings such as in the case study with Richard when I felt rising frustration and the TD case study when I was numb with shock;
- passive-aggressive silences as opposed to mindful contemplation, a difference that was illustrated in Thane's story when we sat in relative silence just noticing the energy shifts, as compared to the Steve H's story when I needed to break for lunch to shift the energy;
- sabotaging acts such as unrealistic demands, processes at odds with objectives, manifestations in the physical environment such as poor acoustics, cold atmospheres, enacting rituals;
- adherence to procedure and process such as privileging meeting agenda, or time of meeting, the bank monthly returns, relying on artefacts such as consultants and spending money to soothe all ills.

I relieve paralysis in a number of ways; care-giving (providing food, shelter, warm gestures), novel approaches (art, creativity, music, doing things differently, changing the room round, asking different questions, appreciative questions, positive psychology). Core to relieving paralysis is approaches that enable and maintain dialogue.

In the Trade Union story this issue was not one of paralysis, that was about holding the space, hence once that opportunity was given in the workshop the room burst into life. Not so the TD, here there was significant paralysis born from relational difficulties that needed relieving before we were able to start the work.

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**Imagery**

At times Imagery occurs and at times it doesn't. There is data in this. In the trade union there was little imagery until I entered into a relationship, the lack of imagery guided my practice to attend to the quality of relationships between workshop participants. In the TD there was very little imagery until the relationship was established and then mediaeval football games and wooden enclosures, I am mindful of the consistently ancient and brutal theme of the images that remained across an extended period of time. Imagery endures, it's "profound", aids recollection, the spilt milk example reconnected me to a woman I had met only briefly, it aids understanding as in the singing lesson and in how I conveyed how I felt to a bereavement counsellor, it is holistic and inclusive of different ways of knowing and whole systems knowing such as the River at the trade union. It can be light touch and funny, it enables us to be alongside each other with diverse viewpoints as in the Bag for Life, people can engage with it as shown by the Tsunami coaching and the Master Class. It informs me; its absence is data in my consultancy, causing me to attend to the quality of relationship.

The experience of using imagery has drawn my attention to the many ways in which we come to know the world; that human activity is a combination of the conventionally explained grounded experience that we have the language, empiricism and attendant social constructions for, which does not give rise to paradox or logical incongruence and which is generally accepted without much controversy. But the experience of bereavement and identifying the role of imagery in my life has pointed me towards that something other which is perceived intuited and experienced and which manifests itself in coincidence, observations, symbolism, bodily sensations, gut feelings, mental images, sensations of energy and chemistry.

My experience of using mental images, which I share in varying degrees in the form of metaphor, or by allowing them to influence my questions and interpretations or simply by putting them out there, invite shared sense making, keep dialogue going and create the opportunity for something more to occur - the relationship to strengthen, a solution to be found, clarity, common understanding, novelty. They enable me to think in the moment because I can trust them, they make difficult news palatable and I am uncensored by self-consciousness. From the responses they invoke they seem impactful without being hurtful and memorable without being insensitive. Maslow refers to this using the Japanese term of Muga. Muga is “the state in which you are doing whatever you are with a total wholeheartedness, without thinking of anything else” (Maslow, 1993, p.243).

The embodied sensations and feelings take me somewhere beyond empathy to get a glimpse of how life might actually be for the other person; anxious, gloomy, energized, breathless, helpless, excited. The feeling is one of having a shared experience and being truly present with my client, responsive without the kind of over-thinking that would cause my internal lenses to distort the picture.

### ***Personal Development***

Has this exercise brought me the peace of mind I was so actively seeking? Have I come to terms with the experience of being bereaved? The frustration remains that I have to make life choices and meet the world in a way that I never imagined, that I would not have to had I not been bereaved. In my working life I have always felt myself to be a true Consultant, very able at getting alongside my client and empathising with what they wanted, their working style and the organisational rhythm. I have not, however, felt myself to be a strong Leader. I say this because I find myself often out of the limelight and reluctant to make a verbal contribution in



some settings. This view of myself has changed, I am a strong leader when I am clear of the ground on which I stand.

The tragedy of a person dying young before achieving his full potential will never leave me, but what I do have now though is a new level of self-awareness that the process of inquiry has given me. It surrounds me like a tool kit and I am better equipped to tolerate and understand why I find some aspects of life more difficult than others.

The aspects of life that I find difficult or unappealing I can accept or find ways to acquire skills or workarounds to mitigate their impact. This seems to be a considerably better place than bereft in a sea of Grief. I can operate from a position of greater authority, both publicly and privately, if I know where my strengths and weaknesses lie. I am better able to accept life where it is than life where I might like it to be. I am in agreement with Braud referencing Berry and Pennebaker 1993 (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 44) when he says that “recognising, owning, honouring and sharing personal experiences, especially an individual’s more unusual or previously unvoiced experiences, are beneficial to physical health and psychological wellbeing”. Rowan expressed it thus; “to get inside one’s own experience, to trust one’s own experience”. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001,p.108).

I reflect back to the initial hesitation and embarrassment as my question emerged, but as I was determined that some good should come of this inquiry, I feel invigorated at having taken the risk of speaking out what was, for me, an incontrovertible truth.

### *Will it be helpful to others?*

Then said a rich man, Speak to us of Giving.

And he answered:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

**Figure 34** Taken from Gibran's *The Prophet*. A text whose use of dichotomies helps me to navigate life.

Wilber describes the transitions that occur in all our lives; separation from our mothers, identifying separateness in early childhood as comparable to other wrenching change such as the death of a loved one. Given that we have the shared experience of facing major Change, my hope is that I can convey how I have tried to use the experience in a positive way. Wilber calls such experiences part of the Centaur stage, a time Rowan describes as moving “away from role-playing and towards authenticity” (Reason & Bradbury, 2011, p. 108), which is highly individualistic but is part of the evolution of the soul. Affording us the opportunity for further integration of the soul leads me to want to encourage all practitioners to embrace Change as having the possibility to contribute to the evolution of themselves and as a consequence their practice. Plotinus alludes to “privileged moments” (Hadot, 1998, p. 25) when “there occurs a kind of awakening, something which has, up until now, remained unconscious, invades the field of consciousness. (Hadot, 1998, p. 26).

Although mental imagery can be seen to be adopted by others, my main advocacy would be to encourage people to find authority in their own voices with the awareness that those voices can be somewhat distorted by life experience. Merleau-Ponty argues that it is not illusion that prohibits us from naively taking for granted that what we perceive is nothing other than what it is; rather he claims, “it is the variance from our own or others perspectives which undermines our naïve confidence and provokes reflective awareness that one’s own perspective is only that – one’s own perspective - and therefore somehow inadequate, but inadequate in comparison to what?” (Dillon, 1998, p. 157).

For those who want to use their intuition I would hope this helps them to ‘name’ their approach, giving legitimacy where necessary and support to ways of knowing that might be away from the mainstream or the more conventional.

The fundamental contribution I would like to make is that I demonstrate the well-being associated with finding my own authentic voice in the hope that it will encourage others to find theirs, and that by celebrating our individuality we will find a mutually enriching unity. As Hadot expressed it; “we can at times rise up to a more perfect inner unity, in which we attain to our living, real, veritable self” (Hadot, 1998, p. 34). Or as Buber expressed it (Buber, 1975, p. 251) it is the classic existential insight that we are responsible for being ourselves “and this is a high and deep responsibility indeed. If we take responsibility for being ourselves, we are fully human”.

Although uncomfortable to devote so much time to myself, and awkward about the extent of some of my disclosure, I find comfort in Maslow’s recollection of Carl Rogers’ words “How does it happen that the deeper we go into ourselves as particular and unique, seeking for our own individual identity the more we find the whole human species” (Maslow, 1992, p. 180) and Brene Brown’s TED talk in which she considers making ourselves vulnerable is essential to living a full life (Brown, 2012).

Working in a rational and logical way felt like living only half a life, a deficit that I compensated before by marrying someone able to make life feel more whole. When I identified that this lay at the source of my unresolved grief I set about filling my own life with the aspects of it that felt incomplete, in my case using my feelings with as much validity as my intellect. This caused a great deal of disturbance as I was aware that there was a discrepancy between my intellect and feeling. Jung described them as getting in each other’s way at the best of times and as a “particularly painful

chapter in the history of the human psyche” (Jung, 2009, p. 66). According to Maslow, the healthiest people have been able to resolve their dichotomies and “live comfortably in both” (Maslow, 1993, pp. 88-89). Whether we are able to find peace of mind from a sense of our own wholeness or whether we seek completeness from others. It was my own experience of being bereaved that brought this into focus and caused me to find a way to adapt to a new reality, and why I now feel more able to embrace life’s challenges. As Jung observed “It is only when conditions have altered so drastically that there is an unendurable rift between the outer situation and our ideas, now become antiquated, that the general problem of our Weltanschauung, or philosophy of life arises, and with it the question of how the primordial images that maintain the flow of instinctive energy are to be reoriented or readapted” (Jung, 2009, p. 51).

Jung advocated a return to our instinctual natures would resolve man’s inner conflict between “conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith” (Jung 2009, p. 58).

## Part 2 The Rational Inquiry

### 6. Ontology & Epistemology

It's not original, Dr Geof Hil, who presented his PhD as Cabaret, inspired the sound track for the music for this section: "I am what I am" (The Gloria Gaynor rendition) for its existential reflections, strong voice and the overall sense of jubilation that it imparts from being so certain of the ground on which one stands.

#### *Action Inquiry Paradigm*

In the course of this doctoral process I am inquiring with others, making observations and refinements to what I do, evaluating and critically reflecting upon my actions in order to understand why I do it. The reason I do this is to improve upon the quality of my life and practice. Developing this reflective approach to enable me to be reflexive in my work is situated within the paradigm of Action Research. Action Research involves practitioners enquiring into their own practice in order to improve their own environment and those that are impacted by it. Reason and Bradbury (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2) explain, the primary purpose of Action Research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. They maintain that Action Research is about working towards practical outcomes and that it is also about creating new forms of understanding, "since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless".

"Traditionally", writes Peter Reason (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, xxv) "science has privileged knowing through thinking over knowing through doing". I want to redress that balance because it is congruent with my value of embracing a diversity of styles

and putting different viewpoints alongside each other. In the interests of achieving balance, I start that by privileging the “doing” and then hold that balance by continually cycling between thinking and doing. This circular process is mediated by mental imagery. Through mental images that occur in my consulting interventions I am checking and verifying my understanding and trying to ensure that my interventions relieve paralysis and keep us in flow. The images inform my understanding, my understanding references theory drawn through academic study, these reference points inform my practice. This cycling through theory and my work is a constant process of refinement and critical reflection and I want to work well and in the moment with “the boundary space between academia and practice” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. xxv).

I am inquiring into the process of my own life, the learning that arose in grief, and establishing what learning can be extracted that is helpful to others who experience similar life-stalling paralysis and wish to be restored to flow. I am doing this firstly through my own small projects of field inquiry, with co-inquirers with whom I have different degrees of relationship, and secondly by developing a model of orientation that will have broader application.

I inquire initially in the first person, assessing the impact of the outside world on my life choices to understand the lenses through which I see the world, and then build communities of practice; co-inquirers who help me to surface more about the elements that make up my practice and how it might be integrated into theirs. The third person inquiry is in its infancy, I reflect on how my own self-learning and self-healing may have broader implications by encouraging practitioners to adopt a similar inquiring mode into their more difficult experiences to discover their own heuristic methods. This first, second and third person strategy of inquiry is suggested by Reason & Bradbury (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. xxvi) to be “the most compelling and enduring kind of Action Research”.

Hence I place this study in the paradigm of Action Research, knowing that my Accounting and IT background could choose a more empirical approach, but with the felt sense that this would be incomplete as that paradigm was found to be lacking when navigating the lived experience of my life. I am siting my reference to Action Research within the Ontology/Epistemology section as I am regarding it a paradigm congruent with my Ontological and Epistemological position, rather than considering it a Methodology.

### *Ontology*

The hunt for my Ontology was like a voyage of discovery, helping me to understand why I seemed so ready to accept a multitude of viewpoints, why I could hold and balance dichotomies in the consulting space. I felt like I was examining each Ontology, trying it on for size and moving onto the next when something didn't fit right. In doing so I discovered I have a drive to be absolutely authentic and honest. I cannot espouse an Ontology for convenience. The search did at least highlight how frustrating and limiting any kind of categoridation can be.

My inclusive and respectful nature made me want to give due regard to all possibilities to show how I had explored them so that even if we disagree you will understand my perspective, this is somewhat fundamental in trying to establish a dialogue, a drive that underpins how I am in the world. Trying to see it as it is for another.

I found the ontologies in western traditions difficult to hold onto; Sir Karl Popper (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000 p. 75) described current ontologies as being “like fishing nets in which we are only catching what the shape and character of our nets



will allow". Depending which part of the fishing net we fall through leaves us separated and categorized, as an approach I find it divisive and at odds with my fundamental belief that there is a Unity which underpins us all that we have all wandered away from aided by language, enculturation, education and doctrine.

A dislike of divisive categorisation in which we can be designated either/or manifests in my working style. I look to boundary the area of focus by delineating it with dichotomies. These dichotomies hold open a circular space, as if I am metaphorically putting my arms around them, creating a space - sometimes by pushing the walls out, sometimes by holding them in. They do not act as a way to restrict possibilities nor exclude any of the participants that belong in that space, equality of opportunity is crucial to me, freedom to choose, choice. Similarly, I do not wish to fall into any one camp, having had assumptions made about me on account of my vegetarianism I reserve everyone's right to not be told how they are by the choices they've made. The space gives everyone the right to enter every room afresh, hence the desire to create a new space in my consulting interventions into which participants might enter anew.

When I am anxious or stressed I occasionally have to be reminded to hold the space open for myself, because I think in the presence of any kind of crisis the ego stirs and separates me from my fellow man, severing connections in a somewhat dysfunctional attempt to preserve my Self. This is where I believe we are fundamentally failing each other, in the presence of so many crises many of us have lost our sense of connection to each other as we anxiously perceived threat and attempt to secure resources for ourselves.

A willingness to enjoy the richness that different perspectives bring by opening a space that is totally inclusive meant I tried to describe myself as ontologically neutral

at one point. It was subsequently shown to me that in itself was an ontological position.

I can understand the world from the perspective of a materialist or idealist. I can perceive the world from monist or pluralist viewpoints, interpret realism and positivism in a way that explains my lived experience. I have worried that this inclusive approach was indicative that I had no identity of my own, that I only existed in relation to how others defined me, but this attenuated when I thought about the battle that sometimes entails when defending my vegetarianism.

It seems the untenability of positivist approaches has been acknowledged in recent years with a general shift towards ontological perspectives that embrace Aristotelean principles of theoretical and practical reasoning alongside empirical knowing. I tried to understand why it didn't seem paradoxical to me to embrace all possibilities not feeling able to ascribe loyalty to any particular set. Maslow advocates that we look at the world like a child, Maslow wrote; "...if you think of the way in which a really young child looks at the world, looks at itself, and at other people it is logical in the sense of having no negatives, no contradictions, no separate identities, no opposites, no mutual exclusions this is a world quite other than the physical world" (Maslow, 1993 p. 85). Seeing the world in this way grants us access, according to Milan Kundera, into the "fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood" (Rorty, 1999, p. 20). This led me to think I had discovered my own Ontology, which if I had I would call Naivism after the art form appreciated for its straightforwardness.

I understand Euro-American thinking cannot see 2 of anything without seeing them as deadly enemies (Jacobs, 2008, p. 42). Bohm explains these Western traditions as having their roots in the Ancient Greeks driving us towards measurement, at the

expense of invoking the wrath of the Gods if we dared to question that. According to Bohm, in Eastern traditions anything that can be measured is likely to be deceptive and should be viewed with suspicion. It is the immeasurable that should be treated as the primary reality. I understand eastern traditions to be more about considering all options and that this is more in keeping with how I embrace the world.

I relate to ideas in Hinduism which doesn't proclaim any one God or Prophet as its founder, it has no single philosophical concept. More importantly, when in my deepest distress there was some comfort in reading that in the Hindu faith, the good and the bad should be embraced as aspects of living a whole life.

My hunt for the perfect Ontology goes on and I wonder about why I am seeking only one.

“There are two ways to arrive at a difficult but valuable conclusion. You can climb up a ladder of related syllogisms, tightening up the rungs as you go by the use of precise language. The other is simply to be up there, high above distracting obstacles, seeing the final stages of the logical climb, but seeing also dozens of other passages of ascent, all reaching the same real place, the same exalted height, - and being there, freely able to look in all directions instead of having to cling insecurely to the ladder of reason, hoping it won't topple over.” (Maslow, 1993, p. xviii).

This tussle with Western traditions aside, I have an affinity with the Existentialists after reading that Sartre described us as an emptiness striving to create a sense of self. It was the experience of loss that created a void that prompted me to strive to find a new self. I can now reason that this could be seen as a space, into which new learning may be possible. I described the experience at the time as a sense of having been reset, taken back to an almost childlike state affording me the opportunity to re-grow in a way that was congruent with my values rather than getting what I could from the

prevailing culture. What it appears was happening as I reflect was giving voice to my ontological perspective that I had buried in keeping with the prevailing culture.

The experiences that caused this reconnection inevitably created disturbance to an extent I could not have imagined, the existentialists refer to this as angst, this is very congruent with the experience of becoming widowed but not the unexpected meaning derived from becoming a mother. In motherhood rather than being empty I would describe myself as a fullness that needed to reach out and seek means of expression.

My main struggles, given in my autobiographical account, find comparison in the life of Søren Kierkegaard; a founding thinker on existentialism whose practical lived approach to philosophy and whose life story led him to conclude that humanity “involves each person engaging in projects in which they must choose their own path” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 26). He made it his mission to liberate people from the illusion of objectivity, a sentiment that resonates with me as I am aware that a by-product of this inquiry is placing my own authentic voice alongside others, validating my own way of being in the world.

In this respect this is something of a feminist type of inquiry privileging experiences that “have not been valued or privileged within the dominant culture” (Braud & Anderson, 1998 p. 45), but the inquiry is not gender based, my voice was not silenced by a prevailing hegemony, my voice was silenced by me, by the choices I made to flourish the best I could in the prevailing culture.

This project based approach to life, both personal and professional, meant I believed myself to be existentialist at the start; I loved Heidegger, his ideas on Dasein, discourse, being with and his values of caring for each other but appalled to discover he had been a Nazi during the war. Ultimately he was labelled a “mit-laufer”,

someone who ran with the pack. Something I wouldn't like to be accused of. I felt concern at what seemed like a disconsolate tone in the writing of other existentialists, namely Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. I felt excited about my project. Perhaps had they involved more care giving to others in their life's project they wouldn't have sounded thus. This disconsolate tone and the very grounded earthly nature of their orientation, attracting mit-laufers was enough to make me press on to find a label attracting those with whom I felt greater kinship. I was trying to reconcile the mystical experience of mental imagery with the IT & Accounting paradigm I had shoehorned myself into. Existentialism did not help me with the spiritual sense of otherness that accompanied my personal and professional life. The mystical ontological position is more in the tradition of Plato and Platonism, more specifically the writings of Plotinus who founded NeoPlatonism.

Plotinus expressed his inner experience in terms consistent with the Platonic tradition. He situated himself and his experience within a hierarchy of realities which extended from the supreme level - God - to the opposite extreme, the level of matter. Pleased to find someone else navigating between dichotomies I read "Plotinus had no difficulties reconciling the fleeting states of divine union with our normal lives; "we must look after our bodies and other people, think rationally, make provisions for the future"; "...the practice of virtues assures a connection between the ecstatic and the everyday" (Hadot, 1998, p. 3) This hierarchical expression of states may be one of the reasons why this is not such an acceptable ontological stance, implying as it does that there is some betterment or worseness between the states. However, if I compare my own experience of feeling fleeting connection to the divine as compared to very grounded moments completely absent of any spiritual intention, I experience them as different aspects of my being in the world which are appropriate for different circumstances. One helps me to be truly alongside my client, the other helps me to conduct my every day.

*Epistemology*

I have been interested in how truths have been identified and upheld ever since fixed ideas about knowledge were used to show the flaws in one of the characters of the JB Priestley play “An Inspector Calls” that I studied at secondary school. In this play the father pronounces the Titanic, which is shortly to embark on its maiden voyage, as the way forward. Priestley challenges us to see just how arrogant we can appear when we strive for certainty, just how wrong we can get it when we follow the prevailing culture rather than respond to a felt sense that something isn’t right. Professor Robert Winston, speaking on Radio 4 - The Infinite Monkey Cage Series 2 Episode 1 (Winston, 2010) referred to a programme he made in 1974 called “Medicine in the Year 2000” which was looking 25 years ahead (just 25 years) and to use his words “looking back at the programme it’s deeply embarrassing because it was completely wrong.” It seems the future will not unravel in a tidy path that we pre-ordain, it is chaotic and random and full of unplanned events and unforeseeable moments and we need to equip ourselves to deal with that. Steiner once remarked that facts changed with every edition of the encyclopaedia. I am not seeking to advocate a way of knowing anymore than I am trying to convert the world to vegetarianism, I am just saying that in my epistemology knowledge is contingent and contextual. I do not walk away from conversations wishing I had said this or thought that, I now trust that in the setting that was “we” it wasn’t appropriate. Heidegger and Nietzsche both “emphasized freedom and choice. ...they (Nietzsche and Heidegger) both argue that we need to face the anxiety that comes from uncertainty and live with passion” and I feel in support of that so long as we keep “...recognising the partial and contingent nature of the knowledge that it produces” (Langdridge D. , 2007, p. 27).

Following Plotinus’ example, I started the process with an intense period of introspection. Jung wrote that introspection and self-knowledge were of “the greatest

importance” (Jung, 1968, p. 47). My Epistemology starts with self-knowledge, I discovered I valued being in connection with others and the somewhat mystical experience of what Buber referred to as the I-Thou moments of relating. These are the times when engagement with others takes on a qualitatively different, spiritual dimension.

One cannot remain marvelling at one’s inner processes forever, just as Ferrer states; you cannot have a spiritual connected life whilst focusing on individual inner experience. “Divorced from wider ethical and social contexts” says Ferrer (Hart, Nelson & Puhakka, 2000, p. 222) “their sacred and transformative quality substantially diminish.” Ferrer makes reference to the Cartesian Subject-Object split. He considers that describing spiritual experience as a subject having an experience with an object is a form of subtle cartesianism that implies a spiritual experience has a beginning middle and end, even before you start to look at it. Ferrer’s belief is that the process is ongoing, and such is my epistemology, a continuous voyage of discovering the world in connection with and mutually supportive of others, affecting how I view my life and what will govern my future actions. In Merleau-Ponty’s ontology (Dillon, 1998, p. 54) “there is no opposition between the order of being and the order of knowing: in both orders, the percept or the phenomenon (conceived as immanent and transcendent) is primary”.

The either/or split is ameliorated by Participatory Pluralism, Ferrer argued that “spiritual participatory events can engage the entire range of human epistemic faculties (e.g. rational, imaginal, somatic, vital, aesthetic, etc)...with the creative unfolding of reality...of ontologically rich religious worlds”.

Barnard wrote, “for myself, participatory spirituality is a much needed corrective to the worldview...that tells us we are nothing more than atomistic cogs in a mindless, uncaring, mechanistic universe. Participatory spirituality, as I see it, proposes a



strikingly different vision, a vision of the universe in which each one of us is seen as integrally connected to wider, deeper dimensions of a dynamic, multileveled and open-ended reality, a reality that is enriched and creatively shaped, moment by moment, by our experiences, choices, and behaviour. Barnard wrote; “Participatory spirituality is a persuasive and potentially transformative vision of reality and selfhood” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008 p. 322).

My desire to enrich cognitive knowing with felt sense experience and perception holds meaning for those following the neo-platonic tradition. Henri Bergson had concerns about Intellect, principally that it apprehended the world as something external, saw the world in discrete units (weights and measures and so on) and treated the world as fundamentally static. Viewing the world in this way Bergson considered that it was inevitable that the intellect would give rise to the natural sciences. However, he considered that the natural sciences created a false view of the world by trying to express it in mathematical terms, Barnard said “any philosophical vision that hopes to remain viable will itself have to change” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 322). This is something akin to the linguistic turn in philosophy in which it was felt that language tended to create reality more than simply represent it. Bergson gives me permission to have more than one way to know the world; the way in which it was modelled by the intellect and the second which he referred to as intuition which I have been thinking about as the metacognitive experience of feeling when you know something. He distinguishes it from feeling or emotion and refers to it as “direct participation in the immediacy of experience” (Bergson, 1999, p. 12), but given that I experience imagery at times of emotional engagement I haven’t been able to make such a split.

My epistemology about how I come to know the world is through the participatory knowledge created when in close connection to other. This is because I believe as

Bergson that “.. our minds, in a way that is far more pronounced than matter, overlap and interpenetrate each other” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 332).

In my introspective accounts I noticed a growing unease with some of the thinking that lay behind approaches to consultancy. Some of the dilemmas I faced occurred when I felt there was an imposition model in which the context was made to fit the model rather than the other way around. Financial systems were under control by procedural means but this was illusory, hierarchies, intending to facilitate workflow, created obstacles. In my personal life; medical truths, economic certainty and so on forced me to question everything because at the point when my world caved in, nothing appeared to be working.

During my consulting career I had already been aware of a sense of indefinable "otherness" but the storm created by this professionally and my personal life demanded that I question this sense.

I lost enormous faith in the medical or scientific model when it sought to poison my husband in the vague hope that he would survive and the cancer wouldn't, the philosophy underpinning such an approach seemed utterly brutal and archaic. I resented the doctors for their powerlessness in this situation and the arrogance of their unquestioning belief in what they were doing. My mother had no concept that Declan wouldn't be cured, young men in this era could not die from this sort of thing and it really made me thoughtful about what cataclysms may befall us, how unprepared we are for reality if we fail to challenge alleged truths.

There is something of a pattern between this and Grazziano's theory of consciousness. Grazziano writes that most scientific research has concentrated on how the cognitive thought in the brain creates awareness, whereas he is interested in how awareness creates cognitive thought. This is akin to my own journey of how my

awareness of what is around me creates cognitive thought. How the unconscious perceptions are manifesting in imagery that illuminates my cognitive life.

The experience of loss and great change called me to question how well that prevailing culture was serving me. It seems it was not. A different approach was required so now I have gone back to the drawing board, mindful that I am exploring my ontology in a way that privileges what I find important, so that this life is not filled with regret at opportunities missed. Mindful that only absolute disaster afforded me the liberation to do that.

What I am finding is a greater sense of wholeness in my life's project. I am making meaning from the experience of consulting with greater reference to my felt sense.

“We do so in order to find meaning in belonging to ever richer and deeper realms of reality...entropy law tells us that every living moment is unique, unrepeatable and irreversible. We owe our very existence to the borrowed available energy of the earth...when we empathise with another human being, there is an unconscious understanding that their very existence, like our own, is a fragile affair, which is made possible by the continuous flow of energy through their being” (Rifkin, 2009, pp. 40-41).

These emotional experiences awaken what Heron referred to as Affective knowing, the bed rock from which other knowing will emerge (Lyle Yorks, 2002, p. 182). At the heart of this meaning making and indeed engagement in the world, Merleau-Ponty places Perception. In Merleau-Ponty's ontology (Dillon, 1998, p. 54) “there is no opposition between the order of being and the order of knowing: in both orders, the percept or the phenomenon (conceived as immanent and transcendent) is

primary”. He says we make meaning in a world full of ambiguity, although what I notice in my consulting is that the client strives for certainty.

When Heron wrote about the ego (Heron, 1992, p. 83), he referred to “a layer of hidden distress, until resolved sustains distorted patterns of attitude and behaviour which tighten the person up in their egoic state”. I needed to resolve the layer of hidden distress so alleviate the distortions in my patterns of attitude. When my awareness manifests in imagery, I don’t want it to be distorted by a layer of distress. I would also add that I expect this will enhance my practice because the amount of time that is spent looking inwards attending to that egoic state leaves little opportunity for looking outwards, being in that attitude of open receptiveness that makes relationship forming possible.

Heron considered that the layers of distress could “keep at bay the deeper forms of affective and imaginal openness which made the child so vulnerable”. The feeling I was keeping something at bay was congruent with the gut feeling I had that something needed to come out, be given voice. I was motivated to inquire further because according to Heron “It is noticeable that people who have done a lot of work on healing the wounded child within tend to open up to transpersonal development”.

I still connect to my earlier assertions that I seek truth and honesty, to not deceive nor be deceived, but I notice myself curiously uninterested in facts and wholly interested in phenomena, I want to know how much I can “know” and how much I construct from my own life story, i.e. how much is deductive and how much is inductive.

I believe that knowing borne of my own intuition has validity but seek to develop and embody the self-awareness that identifies the extent to which my own lenses colour that knowing with when, to use Heron’s model again, I bring that imaginal mode into a conceptual space. I say this from my experience of becoming a mother. This

experience probably stands out more than any other as a time when I was bombarded with “knowledge”. Dazed and confused by what seemed like an unrealistic amount of sometimes contradictory knowing over developmental milestones, vaccinations, sleep routines, weaning and feeding, I was forced to step outside the industry of child-rearing. For the first time I held the authority of others more lightly in order to reconnect to my own innate maternal wisdom. ‘Knowledge’ used to dictate putting babies to sleep on their tummies, not giving them too much love in case they grew up to be ‘spoilt’. There is consistency here between the balance and dichotomy principles of my orientation. Knowledge in my orientation is bounded by the dichotomies of rational and irrational knowing. The space bounded by these dichotomies is the space I navigate around striving to maintain a balance.

Although he has been criticised for a lack of academic rigour, I find meaning in Ferrer’s ideas about Transpersonal Knowledge being participatory and that knowledge might suit a time and an age if it born out of a shared understanding amongst participants. There are pitfalls with Transpersonal knowing, I risk ego-inflation, self-absorption and Integrative Arrestment according to Ferrer.

Ferrer proposes that if spirituality (a term he seems to be using interchangeably with transpersonal knowing) were to be integrated into our everyday lives, we would not have peak moments of spiritual experience but would live a more spiritual life and presumably would transform the world accordingly. My epistemology in this context is not the “of something by someone” Ferrer (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000, p. 228) but the participatory “lived experience” that transforms both self and the world.

### ***How my Ontology informs my Epistemology***

According to Bergson, the starting point of applying this method is the inner experience of the individual, that is how we become aware of the continual flow of an ever-changing process, not the static position as stated by the intellect. Bergson called

this the *durée*. I feel very much less alone to find this writing neatly conveying my lived experience; “Absolute reality as revealed by metaphysical intuition is the ever-rolling stream of time”. Bergson rails against Rationalism and Empiricism, both methods he thinks are trying to apply the static to the ever-changing; we share a dislike of categorization, he calls it the “cardinal error of classical philosophy” (Bergson, 1999, p. 14).

However, once I had found an authentic voice and plateaued at a seemingly different level of conscious awareness, I became unstoppable when I was speaking my own ‘truth’. These were the conditions under which I felt I had something to say and was prepared to challenge the authority of others in a way that I never had before.

Initially, and somewhat ill-advisedly starting with the doctoral process.

It is in Bergson’s description of how to access this knowing that I feel particularly excited; “it can be accomplished only by making an effort to detach oneself from the demands of action, by “inverting” the normal attitude of consciousness and immersing oneself in the current of direct awareness. The result will be a cognition of reality such as intellectual concepts can never yield. In so far as this reality is communicable, it must be expressed in metaphors or “fluid concepts” quite different from the static abstractions of logic” (Bergson, 1999, p. 12). He refers to this knowing as the proper method of metaphysics and considers that the knowledge so attained is “absolute and perfect” (Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 1999, p. 12).

Bergson is clear that there are “two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move around the object, the second that we enter into it” (Bergson, 1999, p. 21). The entering into, the feeling of immersion and going with the flow, being on the same wavelength, really resonates with my inquiry and how I come to know the world. The entering into rather than observing from the outside allows us to grasp the very essence of a thing, that which distinguishes one human

being from another, which may not be so obvious from external observation. This is the experience of being in connection that occurs in the case studies and the point when imagery starts to flow. To Bergson, this is absolute knowledge of an object that is instantly weakened or diluted the moment we try to express it in symbols such as language. He recognises the ongoing tussle of bringing tacit knowledge through into explicit awareness; “it is true that no image can reproduce exactly the original feeling I have of the flow of my own conscious life” (Bergson, 1999, p. 27) but he goes on to say that the image at least gives us something concrete. He writes “No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized” (Bergson, 1999, pp. 27-28).

A contradictory view to this was given by Dyer who said that in order to write about something involved “not an immersion in the actual scene but its opposite, a detachment from it” (Dyer, 2012, p. 95). I do not agree with this viewpoint, despite the Counsellor or Consultant often being advised to remain emotionally detached and whilst aware that we can be so immersed as to be consumed and unable to gain a perspective, I comprehend the world more as Hadot described:

“To ignore our material, psychological or sociological conditioning would indeed be to mystify ourselves. But there is another kind of mystification, just as tragic, although more subtle: it consists in imagining that human life can be reduced to its analyzable, mathematizable, quantifiable, or expressible aspects. One of the great lessons Merleau-Ponty was to teach us that it is perception – that is, lived experience in the full sense of the term – which gives meaning to scientific representations” (Hadot, 1998, p. 112).



Bergson captures my transpersonal shared consciousness feelings, “Bergson argues quite explicitly that because consciousness is not spatial in nature that it is incorrect to think that our memories and thoughts are confined within the physical structure of our brain” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 332).

“Our minds are continually blending and overlapping with other minds (perhaps even non-human minds) in a reciprocal flow of mental information below the surface of our awareness” (ibid).

Bergson goes on to say that if he is correct in this idea of intercommunication between conscious minds, that it might be protective strategy of nature to push such communication out of conscious awareness into our subconscious minds as a way to render it harmless.

There is comfort in Bergson’s words when trying to understand the experience of bereavement, in particular trying to find an explanation for some extraordinary events that will appear acceptable to a wider audience. Bergson proposes that this overlapping consciousness might account for empathetic feeling of connection with our pets or even wild animals in a way that is not a subjective anthropomorphic projection unto another species. He suggests too that the familiar feeling or the subtle awareness of a dearly loved but deceased relative watching over and protecting and guiding us is not simply a wish fulfilment rooted in unresolved grief. Instead he suggests these phenomena may have their roots “in the flow of subliminal information that we constantly receive from the wild and mysterious universe that surrounds and interpenetrates us, but which we, for a variety of evolutionary and psychological reasons, typically ignore or choose not to see” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 333).

As a result of a literature search that so finds such meaning in Plotinus and Bergson, because of a kinship with the life of Mystics and mystical experience, a sense of the One-ness that found meaning in monism, a dialogic perspective that seems capable of embracing many world views and seeing no conflict between them, akin to polytheism, embracing as I am of idealistic tendencies, the outcomes of my search for Causality, feelings about harmony and the soul, an existential-like belief of human potential in this world, unattached to Western Philosophical traditions, finding mean in Goethe's Nature, Steiner's Vegetarianism and more so Jung's dreamwork, I label myself at the end of the ontological search as a neo-Platonist.

Plotinus said there was no issue of separateness or contradiction between our material or spiritual worlds, "they are the same thing at two different levels. Plotinus insists strongly on this continuity. "Our world," he writes, "is not separated from the spiritual world" (Hadot, 1998, p. 38). The wisdom thus conveyed "is not acquired by calculations, since it has always been present as a whole" (Hadot, 1998, p. 40). To explain himself further he uses the analogy of hieroglyphics "each picture is a knowledge, wisdom...perceived all at once, and not discursive thought nor deliberation". Like Goethe whose intention it is to "believe in simplicity" or Leonardo da Vinci for whom simplicity was the ultimate sophistication, "Life, for him, is a formative simple, and immediate activity, irreducible to all our analyses. It is totally present all at once, within itself" (Hadot, 1998, pp. 40-41). "We must give up trying to seek their cause; they have their cause and their meaning within themselves" (Hadot, 1998, p. 41).

## 7. Literature Review

Please enjoy “Rene and Georgia Magritte With Their Dog After the War” by Paul Simon.

Magritte tried adopting other people’s voices (his Renoir and Vache periods) before finding his own style. His *Ceci n’est pas* series points to how we can never truly capture the original object, a struggle I am familiar with as I try to bring tacit knowledge from the imaginal to the conceptual. This song is about them finding the deep forbidden music they’ve been longing for.

There are two strands to this inquiry - my desire for good psychological health so that I can be the best practitioner that I can be and enjoy the best quality of life as an integrated and whole person, and the desire to be clear about my offering and approach to consulting by examining the aspects of my work when I feel myself to be at my best.

The autobiography helped me to surface the values that I hold dear, the tendency I have had in the past to want to escape from situations when these values are transgressed, and then the inescapable experience of loss that caused me to re-evaluate my life and my client offering. The small case studies helped me to discover the ingredients to what felt like my best client interventions and then the larger case studies at the trade union and the department gave me the opportunity to bring these ingredients together, to see how they worked as a recipe.

The methodology guided me through this process of discovery, making it safe and legitimate in an Action Research framework to attend to feelings, to dwell and to meditate, as well as to write furiously and take in data from many sources.

This section is about taking the main themes from what I have uncovered and situating them in what has gone before. My intention is that this will show the contribution that I am making by building on existing research.

This literature review is a validation of that process by exploring whether what I discovered could stand amongst established theory. Anderson writes (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p.70) that previous attempts to explore these kinds of experiences have been rather “stymied by reliance on the experimental methods” and that now, at the beginning of the 21st century, “it is fitting and timely to bring imagination and intuition back into scientific inquiry.”

I feel that the main ideas that I had surfaced for theoretical underpinning are:

- 1) The application of the Transpersonal theory to my work;
- 2) The theoretical framework that underpins the orientation as a whole;
- 3) The use of the Imaginal;
- 4) The current trends in Management Consulting that lead me to feel this work is making a contribution to current practice.

### ***Transpersonal Psychology***

My supervisor tells me I have made life very difficult for myself to site myself in the transpersonal territory, there are other psychological models available that would

make for an easier journey. My drive to be authentic and connect me to what feels like my truth causes me to carry on. I need to explain the spiritual element of my work, the moments when I lose my sense of self and feel truly connected to my client. The moments when I cannot describe what I did or they did because the work has arisen between us.

Anderson (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 69) writes that Transpersonal Psychology is the fourth expression of 20th Century psychology whereas Cunningham wrote in the International Journal of Transpersonal Studies in 2007 that a lack of firm definition was actually leading to doubt about the validity of Transpersonal Psychology and its contribution. It seems one of the principle problems is that it does not fit neatly into a purely psychological domain.

I adopted the word Transpersonal initially because of its etymology;

trans-

1.

a prefix occurring in loanwords from Latin (transcend; transfix); on this model, used with the meanings “across,” “beyond,” “through,” “changing thoroughly,” “transverse,” in combination with elements of any origin: transisthmian; trans-Siberian; transempirical; transvalue. (<http://dictionary.reference.com>)

per·son·al

1. of, pertaining to, or coming as from a particular person; individual; private: a personal opinion.

(<http://dictionary.reference.com>)

“Essentially, the study and practice of “transpersonal” embraces two dimensions:

- 1) Transpersonal experiences (levels and states) available to humankind, but which often represent temporary shifts in consciousness;
- 2) Transpersonal development (mostly of the structures of consciousness) which represent more lasting shifts, (Boucouvalas, 1999, pp. 27-28).

I could recognise 1) as occurring in my client interventions and I was seeking 2) for myself and my recovery. Anderson (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 79) considers that there is interconnectedness between the personal and the political to the universal that draws a complete circle, because “what is particularly sacred in human life is manifested in the individual and community aspects of our lives and the unity that brings us all together”.

Rowan (Reason & Bradbury, 2011, pp. 106-7) references Grof’s succinct description of the transpersonal as “experiences involving an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and beyond the limitations of time and/or space”. Rowan goes on to say “Ego boundaries seem to be stretched or removed” (Reason & Bradbury, 2011, p. 107). He claims that a higher proportion of the population have this kind of experience than are prepared to admit, finding it too disconcerting. Heron wrote “The person is at the edge of Transpersonal work, embarrassed, incredulous and sceptical, afraid and reluctant to let go” (Heron, *Helping the Client*, 1990, p. 26).

Finding there were advantages to talking about things that others found disconcerting was a mainstay of my early grief when I found it enabled others to express themselves if I was prepared to go into the dark spaces of my mind and talk about how I felt.

As some of the experiences I was trying to describe I could only find referenced in Mystical and Metaphysical texts and they seemed to belong to a world that I was uncomfortable to write about for fear of not being taken seriously.

Affirmed in my disappointment at the obstructive nature of language and my dislike of being restricted to any particular field when I have been borrowing from paradigms ranging from Quantum Physics to Spiritual Mysticism, I searched for literature that could support my feelings that what I was inquiring into was both Trans and Personal. I wanted to capture the mystical and unitive experience of when I am most in connection with my client, the profound and inexplicable experience of mental imagery, the spiritual aspects of bereavement and loss, its transformative effect on me. Anderson describes such experiences as largely ignored by conventional psychology. She says such matters are left to “poets, novelists, and playwrights” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 70).

William James is credited with first use of the term in the early part of the 20th Century and yet over 100 years later Walsh (Vaughan & Walsh, 1993, p.199) stated that there is still a perceived need for clear definitions and that the field currently lacks consensus.

Conversely, Barbara Somers (Somers & Brown, 2002, pp. 6-7) is very clear about her use of the Transpersonal in a therapeutic setting, describing her role as being alongside her client, helping to hold their shadow, their own true nature and conscious nature together in what Jung described as a marriage of masculine and feminine energies until such time as the client is restored to their original purpose and meaning. This almost describes my struggle with Grief except that I had effectively walled off these feminine energies and in what appears now to have been an adaptive strategy and derived my feminine energies from Declan.



Somers talks about helping the client to gradually lose their persona in order to be able to do this work whilst she stands in the middle ground between the conscious and unconscious. She asks clients how it feels for them and gradually works with images to afford clients a greater understanding of their own lives. My persona was rather more brutally ripped away by bereavement, but I can relate to the vulnerable self that was then exposed as being able to then begin the work. When I described the effects as a giant wound, I was drawn to Somers writing that “Some have the kind of wound that bleeds and makes them weaker...others have received a wound which becomes the most creative thing that has ever happened to them, from which they can get up and grow” (Somers & Brown, 2002, p. 9).

Working with images, healing a personal wound, Somers’ Transpersonal work describes the personal journey very well, but there is an uncomfortable departure when she talks about the therapist not imposing their images but encouraging the client to find their own. In my client work I am sharing, both finding images and inviting meaning making. When I share images it seems to have some enabling effect, such as when Gwen picked up and went forward with her own imagery. Somers’ work is a great comfort in understanding and explaining my personal journey.

I admire Somers’ approach, she is not about challenging people and causing them to defend themselves nor “banging at their boundaries and making them interact with each other”. She doesn’t question the validity of such work but says it’s not what she is about. Her advocacy is to create a loving environment in which others might let down their guard, their defensiveness. This environment is what I mean when I refer to holding open a space in which a client may choose to step, the generative space in which, by mutual vulnerability, we might move forward. Anderson refers to it as inquiring with “Compassion”, which allows participants to “speak freely and

honestly” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 71). Compassionate knowing is not intrusive, she says. Like the moments of connectedness when I am practicing at my best, there is no object or subject in Anderson’s Compassionate Knowing.

When Vaughan and Walsh (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993) conducted a review of how Transpersonal psychology might be defined, they cited Lahore & Shapiro’s (1992) overview of the definition of the field and found recurring themes in available definitions. These were:

- they made reference to states of consciousness;
- they were engaged in how we might reach our highest or ultimate potential ;
- they involved work that went beyond ego or personal self;
- they made reference to a transcendent nature and;
- they often included some aspect of contact with a Spiritual life.

### ***The Relevance of the Transpersonal in this Inquiry***

#### **Altered States of Consciousness**

The themes outlined by Lahore and Shapiro had surfaced in the course of this inquiry. In trying to identify what was qualitatively different in the times I felt most connected to my client I had noticed a complete shift in the sense I had of myself. I described myself as feeling completely deconstructed. At its most intense it feels like a heightened state of consciousness that transcends, paralysing self-consciousness and recaptures a child-like state of innocence. I feel totally open and receptive, have no sense of myself, would not be surprised to look in the mirror and find my organized, familiar form was a cloud of blue atoms, not “mired in the polarized thinking that produces the dualisms of mind and body, form and matter, activity and passivity, invisible and visible.” (Dillon, 1998, p. 37). Heron describes this as the

transpersonal state, “The Psyche feels at one with a perceptual field which has no boundaries” (Heron, 1992, p. 146).

Vaughan and Walsh advise that it is a political problem for Transpersonalists, to commit to a particular theory can “alienate people who might otherwise be sympathetic to the field” (p201). It seems Transpersonalists are seeking holism, a goal I have often stated after losing the chunk of myself that was life with Declan. Transpersonalists seek to take into account the whole person in a way that transcends simple addition of the parts. It is important to the Transpersonalist that they do not discount any dimensions of experience and that they remain flexible enough to pursue all directions or possibilities of meaning.

Ontologically speaking the Transpersonalist believes there is one transcendent reality that binds us all together and this belief makes it hard for me to espouse a given body, particularly one that alienates others because of all the connotations that surround it. Defining the Transpersonal is not to “tie the disciplines to any particular ontology, metaphysics or worldview, nor to any specific doctrine, philosophy or religion”. Cunningham says that whatever philosophy or worldview transpersonal scholars may prefer, they can find common ground in their affirmation of four key ideas articulated in the Articles of Association for Transpersonal Psychology:

- 1) Impulses toward an ultimate state are continuous in every person;
- 2) Full awareness of these impulses is not necessarily present at any given time;
- 3) The realization of an ultimate state is essentially dependent on direct practice and on conditions suitable to the individual;
- 4) Every individual has the right to choose his [or her] own path. (Sutich, 1972 pp. 93-97).

The second of these is important because Cunningham writes (Cunningham, 2007, pp.41-55) “Intrusions of a creative nature (e.g., unusual ideas, memories, mental images, bodily feelings, and impulses) that originate from other dimensions of actuality may be initially frightening to the individual, considered to be alien or “not-self” and dangerous, perhaps even signs of mental disturbances, and thus are automatically shut out.” Cunningham goes on to say that “Transpersonal impulses continue to operate beneath the surface of conscious awareness whether the person is aware of them or not, but the conscious self is no longer able to perceive its own greater fulfillment, uniqueness, or integrity. The person becomes blind to other attributes with which he or she is naturally gifted and to which the impulses are intended to lead...Communications from the marginal, subliminal realms of consciousness are then permitted to emerge into conscious awareness only during sleep, in dreams, or in instances of creative inspiration.” In my experience they continued to make their presence felt by continually bombarding my conscious mind with the feeling that something was wrong. The process of discovery starts, according to Rogers, with “disquiet about something amiss” (O'Hara, 1986, p. 174). Only when I was bereaved and suffered the deconstructive effects of deep trauma and catastrophic loss were they able to burst through and breach the dam between by conscious and sub-conscious minds. This was the gift of significant change, that it made it possible to see myself in a raw state.

The doctoral process enabled a way to attend to those feelings in a slightly more structured and mostly more contained manner but still I noticed when in the early stages of inquiry I journaled:

*Journal January 2010*

*I find myself on an enormous tidal wave of emotion and feeling some empathy with people who make foil helmets, I feel so bombarded by data and connections I start to wonder if in fact I am going slightly mad.*

**Figure 35** In early journaling I feared I was going mad.

“As the individual generates enough experiential data to counteract limited ideas of the nature of the psyche and its greater world, it becomes easier for the egotistically-oriented portions of the self to accept the possible existence of other streams of awareness and perception.” And after Schumacher the experiences of being and reborn, the case studies and experiences I have put myself in the course of this inquiry, I would concur. “As this occurs, the individual’s ideas of his or her own private reality become changed and understanding of the unknown elements of the self becomes expanded. The limitations and blocks to one’s natural, spontaneous impulses toward self-actualization and ideal development may then become removed. Once individuals acknowledge the existence of such impulses and learn to trust them, they will quite naturally be led to explore their meaning and move in the direction of their ideal development.”

Transpersonal Psychology is a field based in the reference systems of thought considered to be “Existential” or “Humanistic”. A eulogy to James Bugental, a theorist of humanistic psychology, read; “Jim’s transpersonal vitality must be characterised with a lower case “t” and with an emphasis that it determinedly experiential. To the extent that neither the leading theoreticians of the field nor Jim himself considered him to be Transpersonal in the formal sense of the capital “T”...I expect he would be more resonant with the recent “participatory” movement in the field...insofar as it privileges felt experience over theoretical constructs” Bradford (Bradford, 2011, p. 119) goes on to say “Jim privileged the messy complexities of lived experience over the neat orderliness of conceptual schemas...he knew that the

territory of living, unfolding experience could never be adequately mapped, simply because it refused to sit still” (Bradford, 2011, pp. 119-120).

Cunningham notes that the definitions are many and varied, references Ferrer’s constructive “participatory” approach that grants the existence of as many spiritual realities as there are individuals who experience them (Ferrer, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory, A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, 2002). This resonates with Humanistic Psychology which views each person as a unique and special manifestation of humanity and that drives my desire for unique and contextual response to consulting interventions rather than models and formulae. “Respect for and appreciation of the uniqueness and specialness of each person is at the centre of humanistic, person-centred therapy” (Patton, May 1990 pp. 191).

Ferrer writes about Transpersonal Knowledge as being participatory, born out of shared understanding amongst participants. Ferrer suggests transpersonal knowing can be truly transformative if we let go of distortions that may occur, such as aggrandising the self and over pre-occupation with achievements. It was the inquiry into understanding myself first that Ferrer calls for ‘urgent’ integration of Transpersonal Knowing into everyday life, blaming a lack of integration for psychotic disorders and spiritual pathologies, and citing Grof and Grof (1989) and Wilber (1986) in support.

He advocates a pluralistic approach to spiritual enlightenment and an indefinite number of versions of reality, so long as we act with “body, mind, heart and consciousness” (Ferrer, 2011, p. 6), “a thousand spiritual flowers bloom”. “Spirit is not in the I but between you and I” Buber (1970). For Buber, says Ferrer (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000, p. 226) “the realm of the Between or interhuman (das Zwischenmenschliche) has an extra mental independent ontological status”. My epistemology in this context is not the “of something by someone” Ferrer (Hart,

Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000, p. 228) but the participatory “lived experience” that transforms both self and the world.

Barnard finds his own meaning amongst Ferrer’s writing;

“...for myself, participatory spirituality is a much needed corrective to the worldview...that tells us we are nothing more than atomistic cogs in a mindless, uncaring, mechanistic universe. Participatory spirituality, as I see it, proposes a strikingly different vision, a vision of the universe in which each one of us is seen as integrally connected to wider, deeper dimensions of a dynamic multileveled, and open-ended reality, a reality that is enriched and creatively shaped, moment by moment, by our experiences, choices, and behaviour (Barnard, 2012. p. 271).

Being able to access this spiritual place “The result will be a cognition of reality such as intellectual concepts can never yield. In so far as this reality is communicable, it must be expressed in metaphors or “fluid concepts” quite different from the static abstractions of logic” (Bergson, 1999, p. 12). He refers to this knowing as the proper method of metaphysics and considers that the knowledge so attained is “absolute and perfect” (Bergson, 1999, p. 12).

Others who are less receptive to Transpersonal Psychology view the transpersonal experiences as “anomalous” and in Cunningham’s words “as a sign of psychopathology or emotional instability, a relic of magical thinking, the result of a cognitive deficit, or a delusion cast up by the irrational areas of the subconscious – if the existence of the subconscious is acknowledged at all.” However, Maslow noted that when such experiences were reported by Saints, Sages or Great Leaders “the temptation too often has been to consider them not human but supernaturally endowed” (Maslow, 1993, p. 7). He considers human history has been too prone to



sell itself short, attributing “bad” things to being human and humans at their best as “supernatural”.

Cunningham references Hilgard 1992 (Cunningham, 2007, p. 42) “There is no point in forcing all interpretations to fit some standard or ‘accepted’ model”.

Barbara Somers writes with much greater clarity and conviction about her transpersonal approach to therapy. Likening everyone to an apple pip, she describes her role as a therapist is to provide a loving space into which a person might achieve their full appleness. Regardless of the traumas, obstacles and so-called adaptive strategies one might take to circumvent them, she believes it is innate in all of us to grow with the right support into our full appleness.

Barbara’s work speaks much more to the journey I want for myself. She talks of people speaking through their persona, a mask that mediates the demands of the outer world and the inner needs of the individual. Prior to bereavement I can see my persona rather privileged the needs of the outer environment. A mask that was somewhat ill-fitting that led me to the adaptive strategy of marrying Declan to help me live with the discomfort and try to give it purpose. It didn’t occur to me to take the mask off.

### *Application in Consulting*

Towards the end of what I believe is my writing I am trying to create some order and sequence around the preconditions that are necessary for imagery to flourish. I am talking it through with a trusted co-inquirer, a healthcare professional with a background in counselling and working with change. I tell her my approach requires that I form a relationship and a bond of trust, that I try to do this by showing care, potentially with nurturing gestures such as food, that I create a space in which

imagery can facilitate how I understand what is going on for my client, but that the imagery is also a barometer of the degree of relationship between us.

Her comment is that this experience is very similar to the Person-Centred approach developed by Carl Rogers.

In his book “Client Centred Therapy” Carl Rogers describes nondirective approach to therapy, he describes pushing or coercive relationships as superficial and of no lasting benefit, “unless I wanted to demonstrate my own cleverness or learning, I would do better to rely on the client for the direction of movement in the process” (Rogers, Kirschenbaum, & Henderson, 1990, p.13).

Rogers’ Person Centred Approach required complete dedication to the client’s world and process, to maintain “dedication to going with the client’s direction” and “at the clients pace” with “the clients unique way of being” (Person Centred Review Vol 4/No 4 Nov 1989, p. 466) Rogers believed this approach in itself of being engaged passionately in the search for your own truth naturally results in therapeutic gains for both therapist and client. In the overlap with my personal quest in which I feel I am both my own client and therapist, it is the quest for the truth of who I am that has resulted in the therapeutic gain of greater piece of mind.

Rogers believed that the philosophical underpinning of the practitioner was of vital importance, that the practitioner must highly value the worth and significance of the individual needs to be aware of their own drives and advocacy which echoes my drive to create an **autobiography and examine my ontological position.**

## Drive to Self-Actualisation

At the heart of Rogers' therapeutic approach is the principle that given appropriate conditions for self-exploration and inquiry, people will shed defences and gravitate toward psychological health. Rogers' model requires that all living organisms are moving towards self-actualizing. O'Hara wrote that the optimistic belief that this was the case came from his dialogic experience with individuals in therapy. (O'Hara, 1986, p. 173). His biographer, Kirschenbaum, notes that he made this observation after watching a bag of potatoes struggling to self-seed even in the highly unsuitable dark and waterless environment of his parent's basement. This kind of observation appeals to me, learning from being totally open and receptive to one's environment and looking for possibility in the patterns of how organisms behave. The intention of the doctorate has been to provide myself with appropriate conditions for self exploration, to reconnect to the time when raw with grief all defences were down but to employ a process of study to support and provide some structure such that every opportunity for learning might be identified.

## Authenticity

Rogers writes "In my relationships with persons I have found that it does not help, in the long run, to act as though I were something that I am not...I have not found it helpful or effective in my relationships with other people to try to maintain a facade; to act in one way on the surface when I am experiencing something quite different underneath." (Rogers, Kirschenbaum, & Henderson, 1990, p. 19); this speaks to my drive to be authentic.

Given that this is what the client desires, then Rogers places a burden on the therapist to be Genuine, which he describes as "congruent, genuine and integrated person" able

to be “freely and deeply himself with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself” (Rogers, 1957, p. 97).

This obligation in Rogers’ approach, I believe, is the same for the Consultant. It is my belief that the consultant needs to be “freely and deeply” himself and self aware because the moment the consultant is supporting a client, I feel the consultant’s needs and ego are very much secondary to understanding what is going on for the client. This is why I am happy to lose all sense of my own “self” and speak up when I have something to say, but otherwise to work passionately and with great energy to create the environment in which the client flourishes and is able to express and explore their issues with trust and without fear of judgement.

### **Non-Judgmental**

Patton wrote “the therapist has neither the right nor the obligation to sit in judgment” (Patton, 1990, p. 194). Rogers extended that to include the therapist having a non-judgemental attitude towards themselves. He strived to accept all his feelings, good and bad, with warmth and affection. It is instrumental in setting aside our own egoic needs in order to focus on our client; “we cannot thoroughly move away from what we are until we thoroughly accept what we are” (Rogers, Kirschenbaum, & Henderson, 1990, p. 19). Only then can we create the “atmosphere of open inquiry” (person centred review 4/4 1989, p. 468), a state that Paton called “empathetic neutrality” (Patton, 1990, p. 194).

### **Non-Directive**

Rogers’ approach also requires that the therapist have an “Unconditional positive regard” for their client. The therapist “seeks to offer the client an unconditional

acceptance, a positive regard or caring, a non-possessive love.” It cannot be simulated and is totally unaffected by differences in background or beliefs. This shows through in my care giving, it resonates with my experience of becoming a mother, the unconditional loving regard that I have for my children in which I try to create a world in which I don’t seek to control or direct but create opportunities and space in which they might make their own good choices, the loving regard I had for my client George, the Italian client, but this was only made possible when I was working in a way that is congruent with my values.

“All individuals have within themselves the ability to guide their own lives in a manner that is both personally satisfying and socially constructive. In a particular type of helping relationship, we free the individuals to find their inner wisdom and confidence.

An earlier draft of this inquiry made reference to St Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Chap13 v4) in which he describes faith, hope and love as metaphysical concepts that complete the rational view of the world. St Paul recognised that we might have all the knowledge in the world but without love we are no more than a clanging bell. Rogers too references love and the client being “Loved” by which he refers to as a state of being deeply understood and deeply accepted (Rogers, Client-Centred Therapy, 2003, p. 159). Love was the great medium for Paracelsus. It affords people to explore rather than defend themselves, let their guard down in a space of loving energy. Anderson references McClintock (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 80) in that knowing a thing requires loving it. “To know persons, we must love them first and look at the world from their perspective. To know anything, we must love it and become its friend”.

That harmonious order is what I seek to establish or reconnect to in assisting clients to resolve their questions and conundrums. Rogers notes that this whole-hearted

commitment is not without risk to the Therapist and this might explain the levels of exhaustion I feel after practising at my absolute best, the possibility that I am an accelerator rather than a catalyst. O'Hara writes (O'Hara, 1986, p. 179) "it seems unlikely that anything short of love would induce anyone...to leave his or her own comfortable place in the universe to risk taking a look at it from someone else's". Rogers states that the focus in his therapeutic interventions is on allowing the data to emerge as the natural expression of the phenomena being studied and this for me is the point at which, conditions being equal and with a sufficiently strong relationship between us, mental imagery will freely flow.

Rogers requires that the therapist works towards freeing themselves of any presuppositions about individuals or phenomenon. The therapist should feel free, uninhibited and uncontrolled (Rogers, 2003. p. 164).

I had used the period of introspection to facilitate this; I felt I had surfaced some truths and brought all my suppositions into focus and yet still found myself on a search for Causality which served to highlight just how engrained such suppositions can be.

The pursuit of Causality, was one of the first times I became significantly stuck. What was it physiologically, chemically, spiritually, imaginally and psychologically that caused the phenomenon I was inquiring into? Moustakas wrote "traditional empirical investigations presuppose cause-effect relationships while the qualitatively oriented heuristic scientist seeks to discover the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38), suggesting I don't need to establish "cause" to be faithful to the methodology, but the inner drive that I have allowed to guide me throughout this inquiry, pushed me on. Heuristics is also about what compels or attracts, so I continue with the hunt for Causality, hoping that I might also find out why I am privileging the felt sense of the right direction of travel, how

usefully it informs me, especially when others around me are suggesting alternative routes.

I researched this a lot, looking into Theta brainwaves because they are associated with intuition and an experience I had had at Schumacher College which inspired feelings of connection. I read about psychotropic drugs because the experience is very much like Aldous Huxley's and Stanislav Grof's accounts of experiments with LSD and I wondered if I had abnormally high levels of naturally occurring Mescaline which works in a similar way. I considered whether I was autistic or synaesthetic, had structural brain problems or lesions on the brain because of the importance of imagery and Temple Grandin's account of her visual thinking as part of her autism and Jill Bolte Taylor's account of her own stroke and the sensations of floating away that it gave her.

I looked into quantum physics, because the boundaryless nature of the phenomenon resonated with superpositioning and the connectedness resonated with entanglement, Einstein's theory of relativity and the influence that two bodies exert on each other according to their relative size and their proximity to each other, Jung's Active Imagination, Maslow's Farther Reaches of Human Nature, Grof's account of extraordinary things happening to ordinary people; but although I found I wasn't alone in experiencing things that no one seemed to talk about, no one theory emerged to explain what I was trying to convey. I wasn't sure about where new theories started and conflation left off. Frustrated and stuck as to why the hunt for causality felt so important, slightly excited to be on to something new, my mother commenting that I appeared to be slightly bonkers, feeling a little unhinged I sent a list of 30 unexpected connections to my then supervisor, hoping she could ground me as the sensation of floating away with it all was becoming unbearable. I wondered if maybe I could relinquish this drive if I just made something up. Realistically I knew this would not be possible because I had long come to know the moral code that dictated I



only speak in my authentic voice. Realising that drive for finding cause was the real sticking point, rather than the Cause itself, I pick up Jung's Red Book for inspiration. As has so often happened, the answer falls off the page:

“The Spirit of our time spoke to me and said: “What dire urgency could be forcing you to speak all this? This was an awful temptation. I wanted to ponder what inner or outer bind could force me into this, and because I found nothing that I could grasp, I was near to making one up. But with this the spirit of our time had almost brought it about that instead of speaking, I was thinking again about reasons and explanations. But the spirit of the depths spoke to me and said: “To understand a thing is a bridge and possibility of returning to the path. But to explain the matter is arbitrary and sometimes even murder.” (Jung C. G., 2009, p. 230).

The discoveries made by this research into Causality were unexpected, quantum mechanics gave me the confidence to express a phenomenon that might be at odds with conventional ways of knowing, the impact of the observer and the observed recorded in the split test on electrons I read was provable but inexplicable. The principle of entanglement which suggests that coming from the same source we are and will always be in connection with each other and the hypothesis of super-positioning in which something can be simultaneously inseparably everywhere, gave me the confidence to depart from conventional understanding of how mind, matter or even research for that matter has worked, but the real learning in the hunt for Causality was discovering how well mental models can hide below the level of our conscious awareness. Implicit in the hunt for Causality was the presupposition that there was a cause.

Rogers' approach also resonates with my desire to follow what I am energised to do and to use a lack of energy as a source of data, "my total organismic sensing of a situation is more trustworthy than my intellect" (Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 2004, p. 22). He goes on to say; "I can trust my experience", "when an activity feels valuable or worth doing, it is worth doing".

Rogers states that one becomes a Person when one can be open to the experience around, when one is not defensive and able to see truth as subjective and contingent, not seeking certainty, tolerant of ambiguity, trusting of oneself, accepting oneself, one's inner wisdom, one's own authority and willingness to be a process rather than a product.

"One of the most priceless potentialities of life is to have our own thoughts but increasingly society and we come to believe we must all think the same" (Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 2004, p. 22).

### **The Use of the Imaginal**

In his book, *Feeling & Personhood* (Heron, *Feeling & Personhood*, 1992), Heron gives us a map of four modes of Psyche; the Affective, the Imaginal, the Conceptual and the Practical. The modes are not mutually exclusive and continually interact. The Affective embraces feeling and emotion, the Imaginal; Intuition and Imagery. The Conceptual mode is about Reflection and Discrimination and the Practical is about intention and action. When Heron refers to imaging in the imaginal mode he refers to "the capacity of the Psyche to generate an individual viewpoint on life through the use of imagery". (Heron, *Feeling & Personhood*, 1992, p.16).

Heron makes much of the imaginal mind being pre-lingual and this is what helps me to understand my frustration at the shortcomings of language and how some quality is lost as we try to put imagery into words. Nietzsche's criticism of metaphysical

language starts from an examination of how language relates to a more direct experience of "life." He claims that language is inherently metaphorical, incapable of reaching precision, certainty, and complete perspicuity. Linguistically-expressed claims inevitably represent a kind of gross approximation of experience.

Nietzsche sometimes speaks of language as "falsifying" experience, and concepts as "fictions" asserting permanence, enduring identity, universality, and determinate structure. Such "fictions" may serve pragmatic purposes, but we come to lose sight of the origin of such concepts in experience, reifying the concepts into realities.

Heron takes this further to suggest that thinking not only loses some of its quality but actively gets distorted. Heron's imaginal mode emphasises the power of creative thinking, being free of intellectualising problems, and encouraging image streaming. The particular interest for me is Heron's writing about the imaginal mind as illuminating of conscious life. Heron categorised their outcomes in dreams as:

- 1) Metaphors for what is going on in the Psyche;
- 2) Dreams that use "Mythic images" – this is the term Heron ascribes to images that are the condensed repositories of human experience; birth, life, death, age, growth;
- 3) Dreams that come from interaction with the archetypes.

According to Heron, Jung mixed up Mythic Images and Archetypes; Wilber confirms this (Wilber, 1983, p. 218). He writes that all deep structures are archetypal in origin, a mythic image is not "pre-eminently archetypal". I take from this that Archetypal Psychology is not going to throw any additional light specifically on my inquiry area any more than it illuminates our mental processes generally. I am not disregarding Archetypal psychology, in his theory of the imaginal mind Heron states

that the archetypes influence the mythic images, and so inevitably the two levels are “interfused”. Whereas he agrees the ego, anima, animus etc are archetypal, but he writes that the conveying of images into the conscious is archetypal, but only as everything else is. There is, however, still no transpersonal ontology that would accept and account for (Platonic) "archetypal" (or "celestial") and "infinite" levels. (Rothberg, 1986, p. 7).

I find more meaning in Heron’s second category of dream, the mythic image, the condensed foci of life experience that has gone before. Wilber claimed that Jung’s mixing of Archetypal and Mythic images put him out of step with Plato and Plotinus, both of whom inform my ontological position. The practical application of the symbolic significance of the mythic image is a pattern spotting that Capra referred to when I interviewed him and asked him how he used images in dialogue,

“I would communicate a certain passionate curiosity, I would speak to someone as an expert say in a medical field and I would say this really fascinates me how do you go about thinking about this. I have enough culture and education now in various scientific fields that I can draw parallels which would excite the person I am talking to and I have often found they would tell me more than they would publish in their papers and I would really draw them out. So I think an emotional engagement is really important saying I’ve never heard this before it reminds me of something else and drawing people out in that way.”

I think the ability to encapsulate one set of circumstances by reference to another is what creates fresh perspective and the possibility of novel solutions being discovered. I lean on Heron to underpin my work; the imagery, symbolism and mythic images, and the imaginal mode of the mind. Heron acknowledges the distortion and transformation that occurs when one tries to put the image into language by pulling it

through to the conceptual mode. However, I don't feel he is fully able to let go of himself and totally immerse himself in his lived experience and this is why, I think, he refers to our imaginal knowing still being coloured by our cultures and values. I think he retains his sense of self and I think therein lies a crucial difference.

He refers to his ego being active and still being subject to the perceptions and interpretations of our cultural backgrounds. He also says that at some fundamental reality we know we all experience reality the same way - well I'd really question that, I don't have that sense at all.

I want to look into the particular mythic imagery that arises in co-creation with another rather than the use of the imaginal mode to unleash my inner inventiveness. Heron refers to the imaginal layer during perception which portrays the world. I am interested in a transpersonal aspect of mythic imagery that portrays the Consulting issue, capturing and making meaning of it before it gets buried by the conceptual layer. In the imaginal state there is no subject object split, the issue becomes mine, ours. There are no "objects or alienated strangers" but rather "participants in a unified field that includes both seer and seen as non-separable and distinct" (Heron, 1992, p. 146). I want to make a case for reclaiming that imaginal power. I want to "disengage from the conceptual layer and let the stream flow". Heron believes that this puts us in touch with a "universal power of consciousness" (Heron, 1992, p. 147) that bypasses the ego. I think this might be particularly useful in my case, as I feel I am housing an ego a bit tenderised by life experience.

## *Metacognition*

Metacognition was defined by Flavell in 1976 as “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them” (Flavell J. , 1976, p. 232).

It was applied in an educational setting to refer to the amount of knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena at different stages in a child’s development. It was concluded (Flavell J. H., 1979, pp. 906-911) that metacognition plays an important role in a number of areas that I consider form part of the role of the consultant; namely problem solving, oral comprehension, reading comprehension, attention, memory and social cognition.

Flavell divides Metacognition into four processes a) Metacognitive knowledge b) Metacognitive Experiences c) goals or tasks and d) actions and strategies.

Metacognitive knowledge he defines as the variables that interact to affect the outcome of cognitive processes and he divides them between people, tasks and strategies. The person category comprises the truths that one believes about oneself and these are what I have tried to surface through autobiography. This process enabled me to switch from the truths others believed about me to the truths I believed about myself. This was critical to finding my own voice and bringing to mind that which I could remember because this, I felt, was where there was learning to do. The task variable comprises the information available to you during cognition and this is where I feel grateful for a richness of life experience that gives me a library to fall back on. The strategy category refers to how one might identify how to move forward and this is the area where I believe my previous consulting career would have been more prescriptive but that by sharing metacognitive knowledge with my

client I furnish them with more information to enable them to identify their own strategy.

Flavell refers to Metacognitive Experiences as an aspect of Metacognition. This is the aspect of Metacognition that particularly informs this inquiry because I believe that mental imagery is a metacognitive experience. Flavell suggests that metacognitive experiences occur in novel situations requiring significant thought where actions may be risky or weighty, where one is uninhibited. This is entirely congruent with my desire to shed self consciousness in my consulting interventions and to build a relationship based on trust, prior to starting work.

Flavell suggests that megacognitive experiences may be the unconscious metacognitive knowledge entering the conscious mind. Flavell acknowledges that they can be extremely difficult to put into words hence my feelings that things didn't feel right or that I hadn't connected to a truth or that my understanding might be reflected in images. In my case I would expect then that my images are informed by the library of experience that I have, these being my reference points, which is why I feel it is incumbent on the consultant to have as rich a life experience as possible in order to have a large body of reference. I feel we need to embrace the highs and lows as furnishing us with material which we might be able to use in support of others.

To work in this way is a largely introspective process and introspection can be wholly misleading, hence my call for the consultant to be highly self-aware such that even if they cannot fully separate off their understanding of the world, they are at least aware of how the lenses developed by their own particular life experience might colour their view. That which Ach in 1905 referred to as "determining tendency", referenced by Lieberman (Lieberman, 1979, pp. 319-333).



Flavell's earlier work was criticised according to Schwartz and Perfect (Bennett L Schwartz, 2002, p. 3) for not having the benefit of ideas contributed by Nelson and Narens (1990) on Monitoring and Control. These ideas allow the individual to know when they have understood something, our feelings of knowing (Monitoring) and what we might do as a result (Control). When these ideas were initially mooted Schwartz and Bennett (Lisa K Son, 2002, p. 16) assert there was little evidence to suggest that people used their monitoring to control their behaviour. Rather they suggest that the individual experiences feelings but that they have no influence on how we encode, retrieve or solve problems. I feel this more accurately reflects the experience I am relaying in my case studies. Son and Schwartz cite Nelson and Narens' (1990) work that participants' judgements resembled funhouse mirrors – producing reflections that were reliable but distorted. Nelson and Narens rely more on the epiphenomenal nature of metacognition in which it acts as a bridge between dichotomies; decision making and memory, learning and motivation and learning and cognitive development. Son and Bennett (Lisa K Son, 2002) say there is a “remarkable consensus on the heuristic value of an important process” put forward by Nelson and Narens. The theory is of a metalevel and object-level. At the metalevel are dynamic processes that work by assessing the current situation, guided by introspection. This is the process I am familiar with in my consulting interventions, breathing into the energy, atmosphere and feel of a situation, guided by my own energy. The object-level are the individual's actions which are informing the metalevel. To which I would add at the object-level I am also monitoring what I receive from the client. Monitoring precedes retrieval in Nelson and Narens' theory, the retrieval I would align with the experience of mental imagery arising. Part of the retrieval process is obtaining a feeling of knowing.

My earnest desire to put the intellectual alongside the emotional took an unexpected turn recently when I saw this work by Nelson and Narens referenced in a Neuroscientific journal:

Nelson and Narens have proposed a metacognition model that dissociates the objective processing of information (object-level) and the subjective evaluation of the performance (i.e., the metalevel). Neurophysiological evidence also indicates that the prefrontal cortices (PFC) are the brain areas which perform the metalevel function [1]-[3]. A corresponding neural mechanism of Nelson and Narens's model, called dynamic filtering theory [4], [5], indicates that object-level processing is distributed in the posterior cortices and regulated by the prefrontal cortices with a filtering or gating mechanism to select appropriate signals and suppress inappropriate signals and noise. Based on this model, a hypothesis can be developed that, in the case of uncertainty or overloading of object-level processing, the prefrontal cortices will become more active in order to modulate signals and noise. This hypothesis is supported by a recent fMRI study [6] showing that the PFC (Brodmann area 9, BA9) was activated when subjects were overloaded in a bimodal attentional task, compared to a unimodal task. Here, we report a study showing that applying repetitive transmagnetic stimulation (rTMS) over the BA9 in order to interfere with its functional activity resulted in significant increase in guessed responses, compared to three other control conditions (i.e., no-TMS, sham TMS on BA9, and rTMS on Cz). The results are compatible with the dynamic filtering theory and suggest that a malfunction of the PFC would weaken the quality of meta-cognitive percepts and increase the number of guessed responses

**Figure 36** Abstract from an article in Plos One September 2014 Vol 9 Issue 9 p1.

Nelson and Narens' theory was investigated by Neuroscientists in the abstract given above, the location in the brain where the filtering is said to be occurring (see the abstract) bears a striking resemblance to the location I cited in my Transfer Paper as where mental imagery occurs.



You are here

Figure 37 A sketch by Leonardo da Vinci in which he drew the senso commune, the seat of the soul

## 8. Final Words

I was challenged by my supervisor to record the moment when I knew I had changed. Lots of events were handled differently, difficult conversations, a slightly self congratulatory air to the improved quality of my life, greater peace of mind, a contentment at having found my own voice. Is this it? I kept asking myself, is it now? But then some minor setback would send me scuttling into the hinterland, wishing Declan was at my side to help me process, struggling to connect to my authentic self, hear what I thought. I have come to accept that I had no control over the timing or form that this moment would take.

It comes when my writing is faltering, I have 3 months to go and I have missed a deadline. A somewhat caustic email arrives referring to this. I feel hurt by it, not encouraged and somewhat of a failure that I am so stuck. My response to the email is to feel defensive, I don't habitually miss deadlines, this may be the first time I ever have, **a core value is crossed.**

I respond that I am making progress and that I am looking for someone to read my work through before sending it. I notice I am anxious about sending work in a raw state to this supervisor, there is not much of a **relationship** between us, I don't feel we understand each other very well. I have thought about walking away from this thesis, but I am keen to address my **pattern of escaping uncomfortable situations.** I want to go into this **uncomfortable space.**

My supervisor suggests that I am replaying a pattern of avoidance and that consulting with others is evidence of my lack of authority and ownership of my own work. This seems unfair, I have stuck with this feeling I have something to say through difficult

times, exploring difficult and emotional territory that at face value it seems it would be easier to bury. I am even more hurt and importantly for me **I feel misunderstood. My sensitive ego is leaping about like lemon juice on a wound** and I wonder what I am going to do. When the supervisor suggests what I am looking for is another supervisor whirring cogs in my head align and I get that sense of inner peace that happens when I have connected to a truth. I think about what she has said, understand that is how she is receiving me and **try to enter a dialogic space** where I see the world from her point of view. This is not easy, initially I write a response that gives full vent to the unfairness I am feeling, it is precisely the desire to maintain ownership of my work that has brought me to this place. I save the email to Drafts and give myself some quiet reflection time.

I notice the arrival of the petulant **10 year old self**, I feel I am behaving in a spoilt child-like way, naughty. Feeling misunderstood and with my values dangling I feel very **self-aware** in this moment that I am in a bad way and cannot shift this response back onto an adult footing on my own. I reach out initially to my family, the **relationship** I feel with my mom and sister feels stronger than ever since doing this doctorate. However, I also feel that their motivation is to alleviate my upset and I want someone who can tell me things I might find difficult to hear in order to process this situation in an entirely **authentic way**.

I reach out to a former tutor, someone **I felt really understood me** even though we have not been in contact for quite some time, I have always **felt in relationship** with him since he made provocative suggestions about **my true nature that led me to examining this whole sphere of imagery**. I spill out what has happened and he notices my regression, I say I am in a bit of a pickle, he suggests that I am not in a pickle at all, that I am in fact furious. I'm quite pleased at being furious, this sounds healthy and normal and a move away from the entirely reasonable self that I find cloyingly sickly sweet and **frankly inauthentic**. He suggests there is material in this

experience, I already know this. The debate over a new supervisor has been clouded by suggestions from the Course director that **I have not understood** the role of supervisor, which has prompted further defensiveness as I also now feel under attack from an **authority figure**. My tutor cuts through the naming and categorising and definitions and suggests I simply need someone to help me make the best of the next three months. Of course, that is exactly what I need, of course **categorisation** would press some buttons. Operating in an extremely logical way he brings my disassembled self back into **balance**.

Recognizing I am in **crisis** mode he suggests a plan is to write up why, after our brief conversation, I have gone from tearful and frustrated and **stuck** to happy, at ease and raring to get writing. I feel understood. He has brought me back into order, he suggests I write up the experience of my first and second supervisor and the course director that have led me into this distressed state.

My first supervisor advised me to submit, even sending me a card saying she had a good feeling about my thesis. The viva panel didn't, I submitted in August and 4 months later, the week before my panel was due to sit I received an email saying my work was unacceptable. This experience destroyed the **trust** that I had tried so hard to have in my supervisor and left me wishing I had listened to my **own inner wisdom** that had misgivings but which I suppressed because of the encouraging voices around me.

My second supervisor helped me get my writing together into a coherent story but the geographic distance between us and my **need to speak face to face** to fully share the experience and gain **shared understanding** meant that I never got the **relationship** with her established and hence could not receive her feedback in a supportive or constructive matter. As our work together progressed her preferences for Feminist

inquiry and a dislike of some of the mystical and neuroscience references I had made started to take over and, although I had gone quite some way to meet her suggestions, I was keen to maintain my **authentic voice**. Others around me suggested I just take her advice and do whatever was required to “get the wretched thing done”, but I couldn’t compromise. It is more important to me to be honest and authentic than to aim for the prize, an approach I bring to my work.

This experience shows me how my awareness of my practice and my values has helped me to enter into a difficult situation rather than take the rather less constructive escape route.

Now for the more thorny issue of my grief. Have I found a way to liberate myself from the paralysing effects of grief and look forward to a brighter, less anxious future? The truth is I haven’t felt anxious for some time, I have alleviated many of the practical aspects of finding myself alone but not lonely, holidays with specialist single parent companies, financial plans that have made life comfortable and affordable, I have even found it possible to love, reach out to friends and practice my own self-awareness, to no longer need Declan’s voice to speak for me.

The moment I knew I had changed was this. When my father died in 2010 I had a mental image of him being greeted at the door of a cocktail party, in a dinner suit, by my late husband. The event in my head was twinkling and warm, the kind of thing both of them would have enjoyed. When I shared it with my sister and mom they had no problem connecting with it. When I shared it with a friend whose father had recently died she instantly knew what I meant; saying she had had a similar experience of her father sat in a deckchair on a beach next to his also recently departed best friend.



Four years later and I am woken at 3am by a dream. The dream transports me to the cocktail party, I am a bystander on the outside, observing the cocktail party as if through a frosty window. Inside the party is warm and in full swing, all is convivial and bathed in golden light. Standing with their backs to me and apparently unaware I am there is my father and my husband. My father has his arm round Declan's shoulder, patting his back in the slightly awkward way that those not used to showing physical affection have.

"C'mon son," I hear my father say. "You've got to let her go".

## Epilogue

The epilogue is defined by the Free Dictionary (Farlex, 2016) as:

**ep·i·logue** also **ep·i·log** (ěp'ə-lôg', -lôg')

*n.*

1.

**a.** A short poem or speech spoken directly to the audience following the conclusion of a play.

**b.** The performer who delivers such a short poem or speech.

2. A short addition or concluding section at the end of a literary work, often dealing with the future of its characters. Also called *afterword*.

3. An event which reflects meaningfully on a recently ended conflict or struggle.

This chapter is my response to the conditions arising from my final viva.

This seems to be the place they belong.

### Condition 1 What is it about?

The challenge of providing a clear statement of what this inquiry is about provokes many feelings of hurt and misunderstanding when one feels one has already done this several times over.

Therein lies my learning, my desire to understand and feel understood, by myself as much as anyone, lies at the heart of this inquiry.

I am drawing on the work of John Heron to provide some structure to this, specifically his book *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in another key* (1992). This book contains his Theory of the Person, a model of how a person develops

through four psychological modes: Affective, Imaginal, Conceptual and Practical, which mirrors the way this inquiry has developed.

Ultimately as an individual I sought Individuation; the psychological process of becoming aware of one's true inner self. In my case I felt this would be a way to resolve grief, and a way of working as a Consultant since I had become a mother with the demands that placed.

However as the Inquiry has taken its natural course, it seems the peace of mind I have been seeking will only occur if I work within my values and that this may be in conflict with working as a Consultant.

I believe through cultural and societal forces, ( in other words: external factors) that I have privileged the Persona, my mask to the world, without addressing the dissonance that lay behind the choices that resulted. My persona consisted of an amalgam of wife, sister, daughter, IT professional and Accountant and when one aspect of that persona was taken away by the untimely death of my husband, the mosaic into which they were organised crumbled. I was forced to rearrange the pieces to fit a new reality. This inquiry has been the process by which I have done that.

**Who am I seeking to Influence?**

I am seeking to influence anyone who has faced deep and difficult change to see it as an opportunity in which to rearrange their personal mosaic and the patterns they have chosen to create. I am proposing a journey through the inner workings of the self to redress the balance of conforming to external pressures that conflict with my own values. To cease to pursue that which feeds the ego in exchange for that which feeds the soul.

Most importantly I am trying to influence myself, to be mindful of the external pressures and indicators of success and to continue to nurture my own inner voice, to remind myself that I am worthy of inquiry.

As I progress through I hope to show that, congruent with my ontology, the separation of personal individuation and role integration is one of many unrealistic, dualistic splits.

### **How Would I like you to make sense of it**

To resume leaning on Heron for support; I begin with the developmental stage of the Affective mode. The Affective mode arises from the fulfilment of needs and interests. It is, Heron describes, an index of motivational states. I set about in this inquiry compiling my own index of motivational states by examining what had brought me to wish to inquire at all; the dissonance of unresolved unsatisfactory work challenges, the recurring patterns of not wishing to challenge authority, the protracted length of grief and a desire to reconnect to fulfilling times which gave a sense of purpose, unity and wholeness; marriage and motherhood, the opportunities to show care and nurture, the joy of being in nature as a child.

The intention of the autobiography was to raise the specific questions that I was trying to answer through the inquiry, it came as a bit of a surprise to find out I had allowed myself to be so externally influenced without paying attention to my inner wisdom. I wanted to learn specifically what form my inner voice took in order to reconnect to it.

Heron describes permitting the outer world to influence our inner selves as a contracting spiral brought about by our education and social systems.

I initially thought I would inquire into how my IT implementations were successful but came to realise through the autobiography that the aspects of myself that made my IT career successful were being suppressed in other areas of my life; working with my intuition and feeling was not being given any validity except when I lost my self consciousness by working in an area where I felt confident and able to trust my own judgement, however that judgement was derived.

The Affective mode is followed by the Imaginal mode, this is the capacity of the Psyche to generate an individual viewpoint, this was where I started with case studies and conversations to identify the moments when and how my individual viewpoint would arise, how I would perceive where there were issues (stuckness) and how I would generate solutions (mental images).

Interventions yielded images and gave rise to what Heron termed the “intuitive grasp”, an area of “holistic cognition, totalistic comprehension, metaphorical insight,

immediate gnosis” (Heron, 1992, p. 17) It also became apparent that there needed to be a degree of relationship between myself and the other person for these images to arise.

The Conceptual mode follows on from the Imaginal and in the case of this inquiry was formed of trying to make generalisations that would make the Imaginal mode as optimal as possible. It is a period of reflection leading to observation. My observations were that I worked better when there was the opportunity to establish a trusting relationship in order that we might be vulnerable with each other. I found when I showed care and nurture, indicated good intention through my actions and deeds; such as preparing food, or when I acted without judgement, maintained a balance between poles of possibility, showed self awareness about what was I feeling and what were my emotional sensitivities in the moment, my interactions were altogether more honest and satisfactory.

The Affective mode had helped me to identify my own issues which I felt helped prevent me from projecting my own sensitivities into an intervention. This came through in the sections on Ontology and Epistemology. Working through the inquiry at this stage left me sceptical about stereotyping and categorising. These ways to make sense of the world do not work well for me. I wish to be seen as an individual, I imagine others feel the same.

The Practical Mode which arises from the Conceptual, is the mode of action with intention. My intention was to create a way of working that would be congruent with my values and of practical application. In the Literature Review I drew on the Transpersonal, Ferrer’s ideas on Participation, Heron, Bergson’s Metaphysics and some Jungian typology around imagery and dreams. This gave legitimacy to a way of working that privileged feeling and intuition, valued authentic relationship

building, celebrated diversity, recognised the space and time we need to give to resolving our most important issues, valued my own way of being in the world, thereby reversing Heron's contracting spiral and living expansively and with possibility in the world.

I hope this explanation tells you what this inquiry is about and why the chapters are in the order they are, cycling through the modes of psyche Heron set out, and to make sense of the order and how the document is read, in the light of that approach.

**The standards against which I would like to be measured are;**

According to the Centre for Work-based learning, a part of Middlesex University, the intention of a DProf is to focus on my particular work context and my own unique area of interest.

The approach is inter-professional and cuts across disciplines (transdisciplinary).

I have identified a way of working (dealing with profound change) whilst dealing with my own experience. This inquiry is primarily concerned with knowledge that is generated and used in my practice.

As a candidate for this award I undertook a critical reflection of my practice and then designed and undertook a doctoral level practice-based research project in my own



work. At the end of the programme I submitted a research report and took part in an oral examination.

I would like to be judged on;

- The Ability to create a Novel Offering in a Novel way – following the heuristic approach.
- Showing a depth and range of knowledge, particularly in relation to the use of the imaginal and metacognitive skills, that places me at a leading edge of practice in a relatively unexplored area of Coaching.
- I want to be judged on the adequacy of the theoretical underpinning I have given to this field of practice, through the use of the Transpersonal, Participatory and Rogerian approaches to engaging with other, and the interdisciplinary way I have engaged with the mystical and the empirical.
- I want to show that I have engaged with methods and methodology that are entirely congruent with my inquiry in that they have provided support without unfairly influencing the direction of travel, such that I could unravel in a reasonably contained way.
- I want to be judged on the extent to which I have involved others; peers, clients, mentors etc through case study and conversation, critically evaluating and

incorporating their feedback without fear or defence, but rather have synthesised and incorporated feedback through reflection and self-appraisal such that it is intertwined with the inquiry. I would hope to be judged on the range and diversity of input that I have actively sought.

- I want to be judged for my integrity and honesty.
- Above all, I would like to be judged on the contribution to the professional community of the conclusions of the inquiry, through the demonstration of its transformative effect on me.

## **Condition 2 How The Case Studies Inform each other**

I started with Case Study 1 as it formed part of the Affective mode, the period of understanding motivations and drives for starting this inquiry. I was caught off guard by the encounter with Bill, this is the nature of Organic inquiry. I invited Bill to co-inquire given that the conversation had sparked a behaviour I was keen to address; that of not holding my own in a situation where I perceived I was dominated by authority figures and not able to hold my own in a setting where I did not know the language. This became a desirable outcome of this inquiry, to understand where this behaviour came from and address it as a way to move myself and my practice forward. The methodology retrospectively applied was Clark Moustakas Heuristic Methodology – the stage of Initial Awareness. This is the embodied sense that I had something to work on. The method was one of co-operative inquiry with the original idea of understanding my issues with authority but, as can be the case with co-

operative inquiry, this led to new awarenesses ie my use of mental imagery that gave me authority and removed the perceived barrier of language.

I didn't have a problem as such from this cycle of inquiry that needed to be resolved in a subsequent cycle, but I had never been so aware before that I used mental imagery. From the feedback I had from Bill I wanted to gather more information. Hence the second cycle of inquiry in which I wanted to intentionally explore the use of mental imagery. I invited co-inquirers with whom I wished to establish a co-operative and deeper working relationship to engage with me to explore whether new insights were gained or whether there was a perceived improvement to the quality of dialogue. This was a move away from first person inquiry, investigating my own relationship with authority to engaging with others in second person inquiry. This was co-inquiry, and again this cycle yielded greater information; the attempt to split what was going on in my rational mind from my emotional life, and how unrealistic that was.

Also at this point I was working within an Action Research Paradigm – using participative and collaborative methods, carrying out research 'with' rather than 'on' co-inquirers and therefore a cooperative inquiry designed to improve my practice. I was very much interested in the Phenomenological aspect of mental imagery ; privileging how I was experiencing the inquiry over empirical studies of data – hence disregarding Grounded Theory or any other kind of systematic analysis, trusting more the emergent feminist methodology of Organic Inquiry and considering methods such as Autoethnography because of the personal nature of what I was writing about. But I was not inquiring into Grief, I was inquiring into making sense of Change and, not able to truly leave my empirical past behind, my personality needed more structure than Organic inquiry could provide. I did set out to work with Van Manen's

Researching Lived Experience but as I have previously documented this methodology was about writing and re-writing until Themes emerged. With the benefit of hindsight, this might have been a good approach to take but at the time I was making sense of the experience and every experience seemed to be unique so it was living within my values, a dislike of generalisations that caused me press on to find another Methodology that did not require such synthesis. I moved away from Researching Lived Experienced because everything about my inquiry seemed new and not what I set out to do, my Inquiry was leading me and a methodology that ended in discovering Themes, seemed to be to be creating a foregone conclusion, ie that there would be Themes.

I was not looking for patterns in a multiplicity of different experiences, I was inquiring into the singular experience of Mental Imagery and was not sure that Themes necessarily were going to arise.

Cycles of Inquiry should arise to resolve problems that have arisen in the cycle previous, a concern I had from the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle with the DSG group is that we had contracted to support each other, so I wasn't confident that given the context, whether mental imagery was quite so impactful as it had seemed. I was concerned that this group were more invested in our future working together and would incorporate bias, in short were they just 'being nice'? I needed to move away from first person inquiry with friends and colleagues into the Second Person space, as part of an overarching strategy of incorporating First, Second and Third person, into the "most compelling and enduring kind of action research" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. xxvi). Hence in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle I tested this way of working with someone that I could summarise would be considerably less invested.

As the imagery had not flowed quite as readily as in previous encounters, I worked on a hunch that my self consciousness and the degree of relationship was a factor in

how well I could work this way, I unexpectedly gained greater insights when I worked with a friend in the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle.

I began to think about the move to 3<sup>rd</sup> person inquiry. Overall I envisaged a different direction of travel if I this phenomenon was something I could only employ on my own. A co-inquirer used the approach to good effect in Cycle 5, finding it added to the quality of conversation and gave her a different insight to her usual coaching offering. This cycle was a bit of a checkpoint – I didn't want to get too deeply into this if it was not going to have a broader application.

The case study with Richard in Cycle 6 was to find out what would happen if I was too invested, I had challenged other people's investment but not my own. I wanted to find out whether what was occurring was purely a matter of Projection and Transference and therefore an established psychological dynamic and not a novel offering.

Cycles 5 and 6 were carried out in anticipation of the challenges I imagined I would be defending.

I was using other methods; painting, poetry, photography, noticing my energy, dreams, the things that moved me but in terms of the emerging way of working I continued with cooperative inquiry. Michelangelo described the carving of David as removing the marble that wasn't part of the sculpture, this was what it felt like to me.

The Heuristic Methodology continued to inform as I moved out of Initial Awareness that I used mental imagery and into Incubation and Illumination setting myself personal challenges to attend to my inner world and case studies that attended the outer.

In keeping with Co operative Inquiry the Doctoral Programme had a formal assessment period and I was challenged over the extent to which I validate my imagery with my co-inquirer. I obviously choose to address this feedback and create a cycle of inquiry with a total stranger with whom I have no previous relationship, from a different institution with a different epistemology and with a real life problem; that of surfacing his inquiry topic. In short, remove the possibility of Researcher bias beyond that which is commonly accepted element of qualitative research.

Similarly in Cycle 8, the case study with Gwen and 9 with my singing teacher I became more aware of the pattern of the imagery and to trust it even if it seemed wrong by my rational mind.

The last three cycles were further challenges to this way of working, synthesising what had emerged into a way of working and testing its broad application by using it in a family setting, and with public sector and private sector client group settings.

## **Ethics**

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At the heart of ethics is a concern about something or someone other than ourselves and our own desires and self-interest.

This is clearly of particular importance when conducting an Inquiry into one's own practice for the purposes of achieving a doctorate, as there is a tendency to rather focus on ourselves and our self-interest.

Aware of my own ability to become rather too focused on the goal and with a tendency to develop tunnel vision, I put checks and balances in place to ensure I made good choices throughout the Inquiry. I am happy if my work provokes people to make lasting changes that lead to a more fulfilling life but there are no circumstances under which I would wish to do harm to another individual as a product of a doctoral inquiry.

I challenge myself as to whether I have honoured the principles of ethical conduct; have I shown respect, obtained consent?

Where I have named a participant they have given express permission. – but there is a spirit to ethics and not simply a letter.

Some express examples of my ethical conduct would be the interview with Bill Critchley in which I respected his wishes not to disclose the content of our conversation. In the Bag for Life example I removed data that would have enhanced the point I was making but which may have caused hurt and offence.

Given that this has been an emotional journey, part of the ethical behaviour was the management of myself– when did I need to withdraw? – when was the work too emotionally intense? When was it more important to put the needs of my family first?



Is that an ethical dilemma or a value driven choice? I concluded what mattered was that I was looking at the bigger picture.

I have complied with the documentation required by Ashridge, and each of the subjects set out in this fieldwork were clear that I was using the conversations for field work, in support of my doctorate.

Where written consent was completed forms were submitted with my Transfer Paper.

The subject of the opening piece of writing “My Lover” has given verbal but not yet written consent, in reality I believe the writing is about my feelings for my inquiry inspired by an event.

This is not a paper based exercise, on one hand it is a useful proof to have a conversation of sufficient depth that the subject prefers it not to be recounted, on the other I am dealing with individuals feelings and have a responsibility and desire to show due regard and care for that.

Having clarified the exact nature and purpose of my inquiry I am now able to be more mindful of the impact it may be having on others. Having looked inward I can look more outwards.

Right from the start I identified a Transpersonal Psychotherapist and as well as checking out my behaviours with her, she has also agreed to provide back up if any of my future fieldwork subjects feel the need to have follow up conversations.

I also discussed regularly and openly my actions with my Doctoral Supervision Group with my Supervisor present and invited their challenge and input regarding my conduct, intentions and action.

In the examples involving the Trade Union and The Department, there were a great number of people involved and this was paid work. I had asked the primary person engaging me if I could journal my experiences and use them in the reflections of my doctorate. In both instances I obtained verbal consent. As an extra safeguard and given the numbers I was not able to speak to everyone concerned and so on the advice of my supervisor, I have anonymised these pieces of work.

At the risk of repeating myself, Ethics is about more than ticking boxes and following guidelines. Every experience is new and deserves honouring for its uniqueness rather than shoehorning into a pre-existing template. I am a loving, responsible human being, I believe I conduct myself with utmost consideration to ethical factors. I can make mistakes so I situate myself in a framework that gives continual feedback from others about my conduct.

I have worked with my Intuition in both the way I have conducted my Inquiry and as a mainstay in the way of working. The unpredictable nature of this involves everyday moral decision-making, thinking about the choices available and making moral judgements in an ordinary sort of way.

### **What is the Theory that Underpins and is emerging from your practice?**

The fundamental theory is the belief in Dialogue and that we work better and derive better outcomes when we collaborate and work together.

I feel that sometimes Dialogue is less than it could be when a lack of awareness about our selves and our internal worlds gets in the way, when we are unable to suspend judgement and see the world as it is for the other. This is my experience, that sometimes preconceptions of what the other is thinking, shaped by my own life experiences, education and socialising has prevented successful and productive conversations.

As a result of this inquiry I have developed a way of working that is a helpful tool in all my interactions. Whenever I feel Dialogue is disappointing or stuck or looping round familiar unproductive patterns I have a challenge; have I established a relationship of trust with this person? Do I need to revisit that before we try to work together? If I feel the relationship is satisfactory I can go on to look at the balance of power in the room, the appropriateness of the space. In my teaching I ensure the room is tidy, the resources are clean, in my private life I ensure time is available, all parties are comfortable, we are not distracted. I need to ensure that both myself and the other are in good shape, not tired, over emotional, stressed. Obviously perfect conditions cannot constantly be achieved but in their absence I modify my hopes and expectations of what outcomes might look like.

I also accept that sometimes the timing is not right, that authentic change and productive outcomes cannot always be achieved in a timescale that suits me and that relinquishing the illusion of control is helpful. By keeping my eye on the overall goal, all manner of opportunities that I could not have foreseen will often flood in, meaning that outcomes are often even more desirable than I could have envisaged at the outset.

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## What Contribution am I making?

My fundamental contribution to Consulting is the legitimising of intuition and felt sense as a source of knowledge.

I am particularly seeking to challenge and influence myself; to hold to my values and to work in a way that is congruent with them and hence feels authentic.

In my conversations with the Consulting Community, I have heard high levels of dissatisfaction expressed over the impact on personal well being of the long hours and even bullying that seemingly accompanies the industry and so I am promoting a valuing of the self and the values of the self as a bedrock from which a more harmonious life may flow.

One contract manager I worked with recently told me I had been self-indulgent to do a doctorate, clearly completely unaware of the personal and professional cost of studying at such a personal level. She told me that she would have liked to study but she was in debt and choiceless about giving up her income. Another would have like to do a doctorate but felt she was choiceless because she had school fees to pay. In both instances I would have loved for them to take time to reflect on their life choices and hold them up to their values to allow them to either embrace the choices they had made with joy or have the courage to make changes to a life more congruent with what they hold dear.

This doctorate has leveraged me away from corporate life to a new career in teaching, the pay is poor, the benchmark by which I would previously have measured myself as a person, but when I think of myself teaching, the moments when one sees lightbulbs go on in the faces of the students one is addressing, the acceptance of help in a subject area they find both difficult and humiliating compared to the aggression and resistance I have felt in times of corporate consulting, I feel goosepimples.

A manager told me recently that I had changed the learning outcomes for a number of students, how different an experience compared to the pressure to sell and grow business. I look forward to a new career, a new life chapter which would not have been possible but for the joys and sadnesses that lay behind me.

My inquiry findings have become my Pedagogy, creating an environment in which learning might flourish, building non judgemental relationships, open to possibility, showing care for my students, bringing in support and working collaboratively with other departments, using my creative and imaginative talents with my rational and technical skills. I am building the new life I sought.

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